Teach Me How to Eat Like an Israeli
Nationhood, Food Culture and Identity in Israel

Prieto Piastro, Claudia Raquel

Awarding institution:
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Claudia Raquel Prieto Piastro

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ABSTRACT

Israeli food culture mimics the story of the country and the tensions in its society. The diversity of its food and how it is used in celebrations and in the everyday is a reflection of the divisions and tensions within. This dissertation has the aim of understanding the relationship between the food culture of Israel and the creation of its national identity. It is an effort to research what the mundane little things, the behaviours and practices of the everyday, such as cooking and feeding ourselves and others tell us about the place we were born and how we think the people of that place should act and live. In order to develop a better understanding of these topics and the many facets of Israeli nationalism this thesis interrogates how ordinary Israelis use food in their everyday life to construct, perform, consume, choose, talk about and negotiate their idea of nationhood. To answer this question, it uses mainly ethnographic methods that help to explore how Israeli national identity is experienced through its food culture and how social transformations are reflected in the consumption patterns of Israeli society. It argues that national identity cannot be imposed by the elites; on the contrary, it is negotiated, accepted or rejected by ordinary people, and reproduced through their daily routines. It pays attention to the role played by women as socializing agents of new comers: children and immigrants, in the private sphere. It also emphasises the power relationships that are revealed through everyday cooking and the differences between domestic and public food consumption. This thesis is an effort to shed light on the way ordinary people negotiate ideas of nationhood and contribute to its construction.

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Contents

Chapter 1. Nation and the Everyday: How food shapes the nation

In September 2008, I visited Israel for the first time. I didn't go on holiday or with my family; rather I was invited by the Israeli government after winning a college competition organized by the Israeli Embassy in Mexico. My travel companions were the winners from each country in Latin America, and we were mostly college students in our early twenties. We stayed for ten days in a five-star hotel in Jerusalem, and they took us to the Old City, Yad Vashem, Ashkelon, Tel Aviv, Masada, Cesarea, Nazareth. I do not remember the exact itinerary of the trip, but I do recall a physical sensation; that of a full stomach; of being unable to eat anything else. From an endless "Israeli" breakfast every morning in the hotel to a magnificent "Arab" dinner in Abu Gush, the food was one of the main features of the trip. Yemenite food, King's David Hotel dinners, market food, upscale food and even an Indian dinner, they never stopped feeding us. Even lunches in the cafeteria of some government ministries featured, and were talked about with pride. But I also remember struggling to sneak some food in to the hotel, as it was strictly kosher, or starving on a hot day in Jerusalem after realizing it was Ramadan, Shabbat and the evening before the beginning of Rosh Hashana.

Years later I visited Israel for the second time, this time I was hosted by a friend of mine who lived near Tel Aviv. I was expecting a different experience to the one that I'd had on a government-organized trip. It definitely was, but one thing struck me again: the sensation of a full stomach. Although most of my meals on that trip were cooked by my friend's family, they also devoted a lot of time in showing me the culinary offers available in Israel. From ingredients grown in kibbutzim to hundreds of different varieties of hummus, from snacks to fast food places, burgers joints and home cooking they were always pointing out the extraordinary quality of the products grown and cooked in their country. "Nobody is hungry in Israel," my host said to me, while he proudly took me for my fifth meal of the day. That is, of course, how it all started.

Time has passed, and after so many months of fieldwork and years of research, my relationship with Israel and Israelis, as well as with Judaism has changed enormously. However, that feeling of fullness, of complete satisfaction after eating in Israel has never changed, and it is the reason that pushed me to start a PhD about their relationship to food.

When I started to think about my experience with Israeli food several questions came to mind: Why were Israelis, either the government or private citizens, feeding me all the time

and what did it mean for them to say that "nobody is hungry in Israel"? What was the role of food in the construction of their national identity? What was Israeli food?

Those were my first questions, and the answer to most of them are still a work in progress. This thesis is based on them and is an attempt to try to understand the relationship between the food culture of Israel and the creation of its national identity. It is also an effort to research what the mundane little things, the behaviours and practices of the everyday such as cooking and feeding ourselves and others, tell us about the place we are born and how we think the people of that place should act and live. Through research and time those questions were reduced to one, a question that guides this dissertation: How do ordinary Israelis use food in their everyday life to construct, perform, choose, talk about and negotiate their idea of nationhood?

A fundamental part of trying to answer these questions is first to acknowledge that the nation, in this case Israel, is not shaped by a unique group that understands national identity in the same way. Nor can we only talk about elites and ordinary Israelis, but also of sub-groups and social classes that form part of the non-elite groups that also shape the nation. I argue that the nation is not a monolithic construction and that several groups with ethnic, religious, gender and class differences reproduce and negotiate it. Those differences produce contrasting understandings of what it means to be Israeli. In consequence, I understand nations as "zones of conflict"[1] where the identities of different groups and their interests clash constantly, not only on an institutional level but in the everyday life of ordinary people.

The aim of this introduction is to give an overview of the main arguments and questions that this thesis approaches, as well as to explain the importance of studying food and its relationship to nationalism. The chapter is divided into five sections. In the first one, I will present a literature review of the main studies which I build on to situate my own research in relation to the wider debate in the disciplines of food studies, anthropology and nationalism. Secondly, I will explain the theoretical frameworks I use throughout this dissertation, as well as my main contributions to the literature in nationalism studies, food anthropology and gender studies. Thirdly, in the last two sections I will explain my position in the field as an ethnographer and the methodology I used to gather the data I present as well

[1] John Hutchinson. 2005. *Nations as Zones of Conflict.* London: SAGE Publications, p.4.

as the challenges of the research. Finally, I will provide the reader with a brief description of each of the chapters in this thesis.

Israel, food and everyday nationhood

Despite the intensification of the process of globalization in the last decades and the way it has affected our understanding of the state and nationalism as well as the academic debate around it is still a reality of our times. But despite the rising popularity of political parties and candidates with nationalist agendas in the last few years throughout the world, the research concerned with nationalism focuses more on the origins of the nation-state and the high politics sorrounding it than on the understanding and reproduction of nationalism by ordinary people in the everyday. Yet, it is people and their understanding of nationhood, of who is a national and who is not and what it means to belong to the national community that take part in nationalist movements, shaping election results and consequently world politics. Therefore, in order to understand contemporary nationalism, we need to add the study of the everyday to the already complex field of nationalism; it is fundamental that we enquire about the way ordinary people, non-elites, reproduce, talk about, consume and perform the nation, especially in the private sphere where, at least in theory, the authorities have less control over their citizens. As an effort to contribute to answering these questions and generate more, my thesis is based on what is known as the everyday nationalism and banal nationalism approaches. That will be the literature on which I will build my main arguments and that will support and give sense to my ethnography. Consequently, I consider it fundamental to provide the reader with a brief review of the current debates in the literature.

It was with the French Revolution that the notion of the nation started to have political and legal consequences, but it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that studies of nationalism acquired popularity. The critical attention of scholars was triggered by the fascist movements that the world witnessed during the Second World War and the need to explain the tragedies that accompanied them during the first half of the century. By the 1980s, nationalism was at the core of Social Sciences inquiries.[2] Nonetheless, long before the scholarship of the eighties began to treat nationalism as a priority, authors like Ernest Renan were intrigued with the phenomenon of nationalism. Renan, in his famous conference *Qu´est-*

[2] Umut, Ozkirimli. 2000. *Theories of Nationalism,a Critical Introduction.* Kindle ed. London:Palgrave MacMillan.

ce qu´une nation? defined nation as a "soul, a spiritual principle."[3] He saw the nation as a daily referendum where the population choose every day to be part of the nation, and where history is not only understood by what the nation remembers but also by what it forgets.[4]

But it was in the post-war period that nationalist studies became more prominent and by the eighties nationalism studies had reached their peak and several academics such as Ernest Gellner, Anthony Smith, Benedict Anderson, John Hutchinson and Erick Hobsbawm had joined the scholarly debate about the origins and reproduction of nationhood.[5] The modernist approach was born at this time and it became the most famous approach to nationalism to date. According to Anthony Smith, modernists "saw nations as communities of action and purpose, and their creation as the work of innovative individuals and groups within the community."[6]

Ernest Gellner is the most famous exponent of the modernist school. Gellner sustains that nationalism is a theory about political legitimacy; a political construction that has the objective of holding the nation together.[7] He affirms that where there is no state there is no nationalism and that nations, in same way as states, are a contingency and not a necessity.[8] One of the most important critiques of Gellner´s work is his overemphasis on high culture. According to him "Nationalism is essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority and in some cases of the totality of the population".[9] By centering his argument on high culture, he does not give any role to the formation of nationalism in popular culture and he does not see the dynamic and transformative dimensions of culture. Moreover, he denies the role of non-elites in the construction of nationalism and perceives them as mere vessels of the elite's ideology.

Another groundbreaking work of the eighties was Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*; *Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.*[10] In his work, Anderson highlights the cultural aspects of nationalism and how material artefacts such as newspapers can construct national identity by creating a feeling of horizontal solidarity among citizens

[3] Ernest Renan. 1882. *Qu´est-ce qu´une nation?,* Paris 11 of March.[conference].
[4] *Loc. cit.*
[5] Anthony Smith. 2008. *"*The Limits of Everyday Nationhood", *Ethnicities,* 8(4), p. 563-574.
[6] Anthony Smith. 2009. *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach*. New York: Routledge. p.7.
[7] Ernest Gellner. 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher. p.1.
[8] *Ibid.*p.5,.
[9] *Ibid.*p.57.
[10] Benedict Anderson. 1983. *Imagined Communities*. New York-London: Verso.

that will never meet. Anderson's principal innovation is that he does not view nationalism as only a political movement based on political and territorial attachments, but as a cultural construction became a substitute for the hegemonic presence of the religious community.

Anthony Smith agrees with Anderson by asserting the idea of nationalism not only as a political movement but as a symbolic framework.[11] Smith analyses the nation with a *longue duree* approach and considers culture and symbols, as well as memory, traditions, and values as central to the understanding of nations and nationalism. Along with Anderson, Smith seems to understand public culture as an imposition from the political elites, and he does not analyse how it is reproduced in the everyday.

Another classic work that contributes to laying the foundation for the development of theories of everyday nationalism is Hobsbawm and Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition*.[12] Hobsbawm argues that the historical continuity of national traditions is an invention used by modern nationalist movements for different purposes. In his view, elites use historical events as a way of legitimating their projects and nurturing determined value systems.[13] In the case of Israel, Hobsbawm's approach is useful to describe how Israeli authorities have invented some traditions, even places like the archaeological site of the City of David in Jerusalem. However, some of Hobsbawm's theories can be problematic, such as his assumption that the traditions imposed by the elites will necessarily be adopted by the population of a nation. Hobsbawm also overemphasises the role of public ceremonies, forgetting that other elements of culture, like food, fashion, literature, music, and art, in general, have a fundamental, and perhaps even more crucial, role in the construction of nationalism.

Although the classic works mentioned previously are a source of inspiration for this thesis, in developing a conceptualization of the construction of nationalism in the everyday and its social reproduction in Israel I build especially on theories of 'banal nationalism' and 'everyday nationhood'. One of the key authors of this approach is Michael Billig. Taking the North American society as a case study, Billig coined the concept of banal nationalism.[14] Billig´s notion refers to the reproduction of nationalism in small daily acts and how it is "flagged" in countries like the United States and Great Britain. The small American flag waved

[11] Anthony Smith. 1986. *The Ethnic Origins of Nation.* Malden: Blackwell Publishers.
[12] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger.1992. *The Invention of Tradition.* Cambridge University Press: New York.
[13] *Loc. cit.*
[14] Michael Billig. 1995. *Banal Nationalism.* London: Sage Publications.

on the porch of a house reminds citizens silently and discreetly who they are and where their loyalties stand.[15] The flag is a symbol of the commitment a family has to its nation and a continual reminder of nationality and belonging to the nation. According to Billig, the reproduction of banal nationalism can be found especially in political discourse in the sports and in the mass media. Billig recognises the emotional dimensions of nationalism, and he affirms that nationalism, in the end, is a way of thinking; a form of life.[16] On the other hand, Billig subscribes to Anderson's suggestion that a nation has to be imagined and highlights the enormous number of emotional acts that are needed to reproduce the nation and to generate nationalistic feelings. Billig's work gives the emotional and everyday life their rightful place within nationalism, a place that is central to understanding what nationalism and nations mean for the common man and woman. This, according to Billig, does not mean that nationalism is only a feeling or can only be understood in a psychological dimension. Rather, nationalism is a way of being, collectively and individually.[17]

As mentioned before, Billig's concepts centre in the public flagging of nationalism in the everyday (football matches, political discourse, etc.) and not in the private sphere. Although the public display of nationalism is a feature of national identity construction, I will use ethnography to argue that banal nationalism is also flagged in the private sphere, in the kitchens where women discreetly and almost imperceptibly construct identity through their cooking, their menu choices, the ingredients they use and the places they choose to shop. Billig's work favours the study of public events, most of them commonly classified as masculine (sports, political discourses) and ignores women and their role in the flagging of the nation. My dissertation sheds light over this understudied field by highlighting not only the role of the private—of the home—in the reproduction and negotiation of ideas of nationhood but also the key role women take in this nationalist construction especially as agents of socialization in the private sphere.

I argue in my research that nationalist movements, including Zionism, have a conceptualization of womanhood at the centre of their discourse, where women, even though they are generally restrained to traditional gender roles, do have a part in the construction of their societies. Studying the role of women contributes to the understanding

[15] *Loc. cit.*
[16] *Loc. cit.*
[17] *Loc. cit.*

of the ways in which different members of the collectivity imagine the nation, taking us further away from the idea of the nation as a brotherhood of fighting men. More importantly, by understanding that nationalism is fragmented by multiple experiences, we can also explore how the state exerts power over their population, and what capacity they have to inculcate an ideology and identity to its citizens.

Authors have emphasised the relationship between the nation and women. One of the most important works on this topic is Nira Yuval-Davis' *Gender and Nation.* Her work centres on the way notions of womanhood are constructed within national movements.[18] She argues that not only the intelligentsia or the state reproduce nationalism; women reproduce the nation biologically, culturally and symbolically. Even so, Yuval-Davis does not explain how women can exert power in the domestic sphere in order to transmit their own conception of nationhood. On the contrary, she portrays women more as passive actors than as individuals with agency.

Although women are undoubtedly used at different points in history more as receptacles than as agents, their role is vital for the reproduction of certain ideas of nationhood. My thesis poses a different view by highlighting the power relations embedded in the everyday routines and the potential they have for women to become active participants in the process of the construction of the nation. The study of the relationship between everyday routines and tasks carried out by women and the construction of a national identity is one of the main contributions of my thesis to the field of anthropology as well as to nationalism studies. It inscribes itself in the feminist literature that has challenged Western ideas about the situation of women in the Middle East and published works challenging the idea of women as victims without agency. One clear example is the anthropological research of Sabah Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* where she suggests a narrative that contests not only the general ideas about religious women in Egypt, but her own Western feminist prejudices related to women in Islam.[19] Feminist researchers in the Middle East have also shown interest in the role of women in nationalist and social movements. However, as Abu Lughod explains, some of the scholars focusing on nationalism in the Middle East part from the idea that the movements in the region failed women and forgot that nationalism is not only a political

[18] Nira Yuval-Davis. 1997. *Gender and Nation,* London: Sage Publications.
[19] Sabah Mahmood. 2005. *Politics of Piety*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

movement but a cultural one, containing a discourse on womanhood and a feminine project.[20] An example of this literature is the work of Sheila H. Katz specifically about Jewish and Palestinian nationalism.[21] Katz highlights the active role of women in the construction of national identity and critiques the Zionist myth of the liberated Jewish woman. Katz explains that women in the Zionist movement, in particular in the *kibbutzim,* were not treated as equals but confined to their traditional gender roles in the kitchen and the household.[22]

If we look at the case of Israel, the role of women as active participants in the construction of the nation and the national identity is undeniable. This doesn't mean that women have participated as "partners" in the construction of the nation and, contrary to the national Israeli myth, women have not yet achieved equality. My thesis challenges the idea that Israeli women and men enjoy similar rights and social status. The participation of women in the military life of Israel and their high integration in the job market together with the foundational myth of socialist equality have contributed to the widespread belief that Israeli women enjoy the same status as men. But, as I point out through the dissertation, Israeli women continue to be in charge of most of the domestic work as well as being seen as maintaining tradition.

The protagonists of my research are women who from the privacy of their kitchens, are active protagonists in the process of identity formation of the nation. In previous decades, women educated and "nationalized" immigrants through the writing of cookbooks and the establishment of associations and agricultural schools. Nowadays, the kitchen has become a space in which women are able to exert influence over the members of their family and therefore are able to transmit not only their ideas of nationhood but the values they believe are at the core of the national community. They are active performers in the construction of identity. Women, in their everyday lives, have found ways to resist, accept or negotiate ideas of nationhood, state policies, and roles imposed on them. They exercise power from their kitchen by choosing menus, ingredients and distributing food, by deciding which dishes to serve. But they are also constrained by traditions, by their roles as fundamental reproducers of the nation and its values.

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[20] Lila Abu Lughod. 1998. "Feminist Longings and Postcolonial Conditions" in Lila Abu Lughod. Ed. *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
[21] Sheila H. Katz. 2003. *Women and Gender in Early Jewish and Palestinian Nationalism.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
[22] *Loc. cit.*

To study this process of the formation of national identity in which women are the protagonists I relied on the conceptualization of banal nationalism suggested by Michael Billig as well as the concept of everyday nationhood used by Rhys Jones and Peter Merriman. Nonetheless, I will favour this last one over banal nationalism. Academics like Rhys Jones and Peter Merriman have pointed out that the terminology used by Billig has resulted in the separation of hot nationalism from banal nationalism as the latter "can easily be viewed as a totally different kind of context within which nationalism is reproduced when compared with equally distinct hot or exotic scenarios."[23] In contrast, everyday nationalism encompasses both terms: hot and banal nationalism. Jones and Merriman, denote that the "notion of the everyday is particularly useful as a way of conveying the fluid interrelationship between hot and banal nationalism since it explicitly transcends the distinction between the more mundane and the more extreme circumstances that affect individuals lives […] to talk about the everyday reproduction of nationalism, therefore necessarily highlights the multiplicity of nationalist discourses and practices affecting, and affected by, individuals and groups within particular places at specific times."[24]

I also favour this term as the concept of the everyday is particularly important for this thesis. In simple terms, we can understand the everyday as "the essential, taken-for-granted continuum of mundane activities that frames our forays into more esoteric or exotic worlds".[25] Philosophers as Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau are part of a long list of scholars that have tried to define it. According to Lefebvre, the everyday is a concept "upon which the bureaucratic society of controlled consumerism is erected".[26] Lefebvre points out the historicity of the concept by suggesting that that the everyday has existed since the 19th century and is characterized by the problem of repetition that has been a constant in modern history.[27]

Together with repetition, the mundanity of the everyday is highlighted by authors like Mike Featherstone. He suggests that routine, the mundane and the taken for granted characterize the everyday.[28] Featherstone also suggest that the everyday is a mainly feminine

[23] Jones Rhys Peter Merriman. 2009 "Hot, Banal and Everyday Nationalism: Bilingual Road Signs in Wales", *Political Geography* 28, pp.165.
[24] *Ibid.* p.172.
[25] Rita Felski. 2000*. Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture*, New York: NYU Press. p.76
[26] Henri Lefebvre and Christine Levich, 1987. "The Everyday and Everydayness". *Yale French Studies* 73:.7
[27] *Ibid.*p.10.
[28] Mike Featherstone.1992. "The Heroic Life and Everyday Life" *Theory, Culture and Society.* 9. pp.160.

space in which women in particular carry out the reproductive and maintenance tasks.[29] The importance of the role of women in the everyday is undeniable, and has also been studied by feminiss scholars. Rita Felski highlights the importance of the temporality of the concept but relates it to the concept of home, a undoubtedly gendered space.[30] By relating these two concepts she is able to suggest the dynamism and not only the repetition that characterizes the everyday.[31]

The home, and the everyday are both seen traditionally as spaces of female subordination. However, as I will argue later in this thesis, through the practice of the everyday, women are able to find moments of redemption, especially by the use of what Michel de Certeau famously calls tactics.[32]

Atsuko Ichijo and Ronald Ranta also argue that "the term everyday suggests something that exists beyond the influence of the state; because everyday nationalism provides multiple opportunities for individuals and groups to resist the state's projects; and because it enables the researcher to capture the ways in which nationalism is experienced by members of a nation on a daily basis."[33] It is in the everyday where most of the activities of ordinary people take place, and is through its routines that life becomes organized and structured.[34] The everyday comprises an enormous amount of possibilities, especially in the private sphere where the interference of the government and elites are fewer, and therefore ordinary people can resist and negotiate any attempt of imposing identity or nationalist concepts with more freedom. Of course, this is not true in any country or at any time. As I will describe in Chapters 2 and 3, during times of scarcity and war, the Israeli government directly interfered in the everyday life of its citizens not only by rationing food but even by checking the items stored in private cupboards. However, even in those circumstances, Israelis, especially women, found ways to negotiate the nationalist behaviours that were imposed on and expected of them, even if it meant putting their families before their country.

[29] *Ibid.*p.162.
[30] Rita Felski. *Op. cit.* p.86.
[31] *Loc. cit.*
[32] Michel de Certeau. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday life.* Trans. Steven Rendall. London: University of California Press. P.XIX.
[33] Atsuko Ichijo and Ronald Ranta. 2016. *Food, National Identity and Nationalism from Everyday to Global Politics.* Hampshire-New York: Palgrave-MacMillan pp. 62.
[34] Michael Skey. 2011. *National Belonging and Everyday Life,* New York-Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. p.15.

To continue focusing on the conceptualization of everyday nationhood, I build especially on the work of Jon E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss.[35] The authors contest the idea that ordinary people are simply vessels of national content created by the elites and suggest that nationalism is not only the result of macro-structures but of the practices and routines of ordinary people.[36] Fox and Miller-Idris propose four ways in which nationhood is produced and reproduced in the every day: talking the nation, choosing the nation, performing the nation and consuming the nation.[37] I explore these forms in which the nation is reproduced by ordinary people in every chapter throughout this dissertation.

The relationship between food culture and national identity can be examined in different ways and through several theoretical lenses. As argued previously, in this thesis I analyse the role of food in the construction of national identity by highlighting the prominence of the everyday in the reproduction and negotiation of nationalism. In each one of the chapters that I present in the thesis, these approaches are taken into account and developed, so the relationship between food, the nation, ordinary people and the everyday becomes clearer. Fox and Miller-Idriss define talking the nation as "the discursive construction of the nation through routine talk in interaction," while choosing the nation makes reference to the decisions ordinary people take that reflect their nationhood.[38] By performing the nation the authors indicate how through the ritual enactment of symbols the nation is reproduced, and finally consuming the nation refers to the consumption habits through which ordinary people express the nation.[39]

Although this approach to everyday nationhood is an adequate one for answering the questions I posed at the beginning of this chapter, I'm aware of the limits that everyday nationhood theory has, particularly to the critiques made by Anthony Smith.[40] Smith centres his critique in the ahistoricity of the everyday nationhood approach as well as the omission of the role of elites in the construction of the nation and the non-differentiation of ordinary people.[41] I find Smith's critiques valid and therefore, through the dissertation I have tried to acknowledge them and take them into account for my analysis. Firstly, I recognise the

[35] Jon E. Fox, Cynthia Miller-Idriss. 2008. "Everyday Nationhood", *Ethnicities* 8(4) 536-576.
[36] *Ibid.* p. 536.
[37] *Ibid.* p. 537.
[38] *Loc. cit.*
[39] *Loc. cit.*
[40] Anthony Smith, 2008, *loc. cit.*
[41] *Loc. cit.*

constant importance of history and the role of elites in the construction of national identity. I have included two chapters focusing particularly on history as well as subsections in each chapter. I have done this with the aim of contextualizing my research and to avoid giving an ahistorical approach. Nations, as well as national identity, are dynamic constructions and their change over time is also reflected in the everyday.

Secondly, everyday nationalism theorists focus their attention on bottom-up approaches—in contrast to the classic top-down approach—that help them to establish the importance of ordinary people as well as their agency in the construction of national identities.[42] However, Anthony Smith affirms that this approach gives a partial view of how nationalism is built as it omits the role of the elites from its analysis. Smith also affirms everyday nationalism is an ahistorical approach that ignores the past of the communities and its role in the imagining of the nation. Undoubtedly, elites play a fundamental role in the construction of the nation, and national identity is only born from the constant negotiation between elites and non-elites of what it means to be part of certain national community. In the following chapters, I emphasise the role of institutions like universities, language schools and the government in imposing certain ideas of nationhood, and the interaction with the ideas ordinary people have. This provides us with a better picture of how nationhood is constructed and the fundamental role of its reproduction in the private sphere through routine and mundane acts like shopping and cooking.

Thirdly, ordinary people do not represent a monolithic classification. Israeli society is constituted by a multitude of subcultural groups divided by ethnicity, religion, class, education and political views. Each group and each individual has a different understanding of what the nation is and what it means to be national. These different understandings of what it means to be part of the nation are not exclusive to Israeli society, however the ferocity and depth of the divisions separate the Israeli case from other older nations.

As we can conclude from the review above, although studies of everyday nationalism are now more common, the role of women as main actors in the private sphere and therefore fundamental for the transition of national identity has been ignored. It is then not surprising, as women and food as well as feeding are commonly related, that the relationship between

[42]Atsuko Ichijo and Ronal Ranta. *op. cit.,* p.22.

food and nationalism has also been understudied.[43] Moreover, food studies centring on Israel are not common, even when in the last couple of years there has been a rise in interest from the general public. Israeli food has become fashionable in cities like London and New York, and a considerable number of Israeli food cookbooks have been published in English. Although there is still a lot to do, some academics have contributed to this boom in Israeli food, chefs, and cookbooks and in the last few years, more papers and books have been devoted to Israeli food or its role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The field of food studies was neglected by the social sciences until the second half of the 20th century, and it was not until the eighties that it began to gain real popularity. Anthropology opened the doors for food studies. From commensality to dietary restrictions and the history of particular ingredients, anthropologists have rigorously studied all the social aspects of food.

Anthropologists were followed by historians, and the food studies field bloomed. However, important topics were forgotten, and it was not until recent years that they started to be explored. One of these is food and its relationship with nationalism, its use as political propaganda, and its implications for the "imagining" of the national community**.** This oversight seems a consequence of the unwillingness of the scholars dedicated to the study of nationalism and national identities to recognise the pre-eminence of everyday life and material culture in the formation of these movements**.** Arjun Appadurai is the pioneer in this subject, and he was able to successfully demonstrate the relationship between food and nationalism. Appadurai took items such as cookbooks to understand how nationalism is constructed on a day to day basis and demonstrated that what are believed to be simple and naïve pieces of culture can be used as political instruments.[44] Appadurai´s work on food analyses how regional cookbooks were used to create an Indian national cuisine and to imagine the national community. By exploring other regions' cooking traditions, Indian women were able to imagine, from their kitchen, a national post-industrial community rooted in ethnic ties. The author emphasises women and the everyday as the fundamental elements for the imagining of the national community and for the invention of popular nationalism.[45]

[43] *Ibid.* p.1.

[44] Arjan Appadurai. 1988. "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India". *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30(1). 3-24.

[45] *Loc. cit.*

It is women trying to explore new dishes to impress their families and guests that are able to become cosmopolitan citizens of India.

Another important ethnographic work relating food to the construction of the nation is the research by Richard Wilk conducted in Belize. Wilk's work looks at the relationship between food and nationalism in Belize and how food reflects the creation of an identity and the transition from colony to independent nation.[46] He also points out the creation of an official food discourse that pretends to acknowledge the singularities of the country.

Feminist studies have contributed greatly to the legitimation of the field of food studies. Particularly important for my understanding of the relationship between women and food has been the work of Carole Counihan[47] with women in Florence as well as the renowned article by Allison exploring power relations embedded in the female art of making obento boxes for school children in Japan.[48]

One of the seminal works in the study of food and nationalism is the article written by Catherine Palmer, where she shows, through an analysis of recent works in the field, the theoretical importance of food, the body and the landscape to the construction of national identity.[49] Palmer sustains that in order to understand how nationalisms are practiced, it is fundamental to examine how ordinary people, not normally engaged in theoretical debates, understand and reproduce the "theory."[50] Palmer affirms that "culturally defined food choices and patterns of eating eventually came to be seen as characteristic of a people and a country"[51], and that it is therefore worth studying their relationship with the nation. This "reproduction" of nationalist theory can be observed in different behaviours adopted by my participants. One concrete example is how they negotiate the religious status quo of the State of Israel. Officially, Israel is a kosher nation, but ordinary Israelis interpret this in ways that are in accordance to their lifestyles.

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[46] Richard Wilk. 2013. "Real Belizean Food: Building Local Identity in the Transnational Caribbean". In Counihan, Carole, Van Esterik, Penny eds. *Food and culture, a reader.* 3 ed. New York-London: Routledge.
[47] Carole Counihan. 2004. *Around the Tuscan Table.* New York: Routledge.
[48] Anne Allison. 1991. "Japanese Mothers and Obentos: The Lunch-box as Ideological State Apparatus", *Anthropological Quarterly.*64:4. pp.195-208.
[49] Catherine Palmer, 1998. "From Theory to Practice: Experiencing the Nation in Everyday Life"*, Journal of Material Culture.* 3(2) pp.175-199.
[50] *Ibid.* p.179.
[51] *Ibid.* p.191.

Although a more frequent topic in anthropology than in other social sciences, historians have also pointed out the importance of food culture for nationalism. One excellent example is the work of Jeffrey M. Pilchner, *Que Vivan Los Tamales,* a comprehensive analysis of the formation of Mexican national cuisine.[52] It is a detailed reflection of how national cuisine was constructed from pre-hispanic times to the post-revolution era. It is also an analysis of how cooking can be used as a political tool to promote and preserve the core values of a government or a revolution. Highlighting continuities and discontinuities in the culinary discourse of Mexican politicians, Pilchner is able to present one of the most complete historical works relating nationalism and popular culture.

Another key aspect of the relationship between food and nation is the capacity food has to evoke memories; individual or collective. Food is a vehicle of nostalgia and therefore is central to the construction of identity. Collective memory helps its members to differentiate between what is edible from what is not, and is determined by the cultural taste of their communities. The most famous work devoted to food and memory is *Remembrance of Repast: An Anthropology of Food and Memory,* written by David E. Sutton. Sutton's book is an ethnography of his field research on the Greek Island of Kalymnos. He studies the structure behind meals, the rituals related to food like agricultural cycles, and how they facilitate remembering.[53] Sutton sustains that food memories are a type of historical consciousness, where the way people remember food is connected to the way they relate to past events.[54] In my work, I explore how different generations of women in Israel have dissimilar historical consciousness: Ashkenazi grandmothers that survived the Holocaust relate to food in ways that their granddaughters married to Mizrahi men cannot understand. Pickled cucumbers can provoke the diner to remember the unpleasant times of the ghetto, while the Israeli salad can trigger memories of the times of the kibbutz. But there are not only generational divisions: class, ethnic origin, and different diasporic experiences can provoke different understandings of food, and therefore of what the nation is that is unique and not shared with other citizens of the same state. Food studies have also focused on the analysis of culinary traditions in different regions of the world. In the case of the Middle East, the compilation made by Sami

[52] Jeffrey Pilcher. 1998. *¡Que Vivan los Tamales! Food and the Making of Mexican Identity.* Alburquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
[53] David Sutton. 2001. *Remembrance of Repast: an Anthropology of food and memory.* New York: Berg Publishing.
[54] *Loc. cit.*

Zubaida is one of the best examples of the material available in the field. It includes articles that analyse food cultures from the Middle East from different perspectives and historical times.

In the case of Israel, food has generally been reduced to the study of particularly controversial items like falafel or hummus and the conflicts around the origins and nationality of these items.[55] Although these dishes are fundamental for Israeli identity and should not be ignored, the existing literature has largely overlooked the European influences on Israeli food and has centred instead on the appropriation and consumption of Arab traditional dishes. With the exception of historical studies like Ofra Tene's paper on the emergence of Ashkenazi food in Israel,[56] most ignore the defining influence of European Jewish tradition in the shaping of the Israeli diet. This silence might be related to the scholarly stress in studying the Israeli-Palestinian conflict while leaving aside the importance of studying the Israeli society within. It could also be a result of Israeli propaganda that has emphasised internationally the Israeli preference for local and regional dishes like hummus and falafel. This emphasis in the study of controversial items related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has overshadowed the tensions within Israeli society and by consequence bottom-up analyses of Israeli society are still scarce. My research contributes to shedding light on these topics by stressing how non-elite actors reproduce and negotiate the nation and its core values and how the elites are not the only active actors in the construction of nationhood. By understanding how non-elites imagine the nation and by highlighting the differences in how different groups within Israeli society understand the core social values, we are not only elucidating the way Israeli society operates, but also the deep and hidden causes by which Israeli nationalism and Palestinian nationalism are confronted.

Until 2017, the most important work on Israeli food was the historical study by Yael Raviv: *Falafel Nation.*[57] Raviv's book presents compelling historical research about the origins of Israeli food culture and its later developments. Although Raviv's work has been fundamental for the development of this field, she oversees the ethnic conflicts that the food culture of the country reveals as well as the political discourse behind it. On the other hand,

[55] Dafna Hirsch and Ofra Tene. 2013. "Hummus: The Making of an Israeli Culinary Cult ", *Journal of Consumer Culture* 13(1)25-45.

[56] Ofra Tene. 2015. "The New immigrant must not only learn, he must also forget", in Anat Helman, *Jews and their Foodways,* New York: Oxford University Press [kindle edition].

[57] Yael Raviv. *Falafel Nation.* 2015. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.

work by Ronald Ranta highlights the social and political implications of Israeli food culture, and focuses especially on the consumption of Arab food in Israel by Jewish Israelis.[58] His historical studies about the relationship of nationhood and food culture were particularly useful for my own work as they allowed me to understand better the process through which Israeli food culture came to be.

Israeli academics have also devoted some of their studies to Israeli food. Liora Gvion was one of the first to focus on the study of Arab (Palestinian) food in Israel and food practices among Arab Israelis.[59] She analyses Palestinian cooking and traditional food, emphasising the Israeli influence on Palestinian cuisine. Continuing with the study of Palestinian food in Israel is the work of Yonatan Mendel, and Ronald Ranta focuses on the consumption of Arab food by Israeli Jews and the implication this has on their national identity.[60] Another important article addressing food culture in Israel is Rafi Groslik's research about hummus consumption in Israel.[61] It focuses on the consumption of organic food and the impact of globalization on the production of local foods without forgetting the national importance of hummus.

Nir Avieli's work represents the most comprehensive ehtnographic work on Israeli food. In his most recent book, published in 2017, he sustains that "the defining qualities of Israeli cuisine are not specific tastes or seasoning or a set of popular dishes. Rather contemporary Israeli cuisine is defined by very large servings". [62] The book presents a collection of different ethnographic studies focusing on public and instutionalized cooking and eating in Israel. Although his main arguments are compelling, Avieli does not talk about private food culture in Israel which leaves a gap in his anthropological studies of Israeli food.

These works are at the core of studies of Israeli food in the English language. And although they are right in highlighting Arab dishes in the Israeli diet, they have left behind other fundamental influences on the Israeli table. With the exception of the studies of Ronald Ranta[63], most of the studies are devoted to the analysis of the consumption of particularly

[58] Yonatan Mendel and Ronald Ranta. 2014. "Consuming Palestine: Palestine and Palestinians in Israeli Food Culture." *Ethnicities* 14 (3): 412-435.
[59] Liora, Gvion. L. 2012. *Beyond Hummus and Falafel.* Los Angeles-London: University of California Press.
[60] Yonatan Mendel and Ronald Ranta. 2014. "Consuming Palestine: Palestine and Palestinians in Israeli Food Culture", *Ethnicities,* 14 (3).412-435.
[61] Rafi Grosglik. 2011. "Organic Hummus in Israel: Global and Local Ingredients and Images". *Sociological research online,* 16 (2) 1-11.
[62] Nir Avieli. 2018. *Food and Power: A culinary ethnography of Israel.* Oakland: University of California Press. p.15.

controversial dishes like falafel or hummus. Most of them have also ignored the private sphere of the Jewish Israeli kitchen and its importance in the reproduction of the nation. Although it is true that what is commonly known as Arab food has a predominant place on the Israeli table, it is a mistake to take it as the only influence on it**.**

National cuisines, everywhere, are a blend of continuities and changes in identities, customs, and migrations. An Israeli homemade meal does include both Middle Eastern food as well as European schnitzels or hamburgers. Israeli tables reflect the result of political changes, migration patterns, wars, and the efforts made by the government to create and recreate an Israeli identity as well as how ordinary people have accepted, rejected and negotiate these impositions. My research contributes to the developments of the field of food studies and Israeli Studies by presenting an ethnographic and not a historical work, that throws light over the relationship between nationalism and food culture in Israel, a field that has not yet been deeply studied. It focuses on topics that have been previously ignored, especially the domestic reproduction of the nation by women, fundamental actors for the construction and transmission of the national identity to newcomers (children and immigrants). It tries to present a complicated picture of Israeli society, particularly by arguing that food culture highlights not only the uniting elements among nationals but also the discontinuities, conflicts and the violence within a nation, especially through the process of stablishing a collective identity.

In order to explain the complicated process through which Israeli food culture was shaped I apply the term *creolization,* that will be explained in detail in the last chapter of my thesis; and reject the idea of *melting pot* by presenting a more complex and detailed image of the violent and contradictory elements that clash together to shape the food culture, and the culture in general, of a new nation. I have not either overlooked or privileged the culinary influence of one group above the other, instead I have included all of those perspectives that seem to me of greater influence even when my participants tried to silence them as a Palestinian participant did. In terms of nationalism studies, my contribution lies in the use of an everyday nationhood theoretical framework that I applied to study the case of Israel highlighting not only the importance of mundane routines in the construction of national identity but those routines that have a place in the privacy of homes in which women become

fundamental agents of nationhood. The importance of studying the private sphere in relation to the nation lies in its capacity to be a site were ordinary people are free and simultaneously restrained by power relations, hierarchies and social constraints. It is the first place where new members of the family are taught how to be national and where ordinary people can negotiate most of the time without fearing the meaning of belonging to a certain community.

The ethnographic voice

My PhD was the result not only of my academic curiosity but was part of my search for an identity and my desire for understanding on a personal level what being national, what belonging clearly to a community feels like. Therefore, I recognise that my own identity and my quest for defining myself greatly shaped the ethnographic encounter.[64] My cultural and religious background played a fundamental role in the way that I interpreted the data I collected, but also in the way I established relationships with my informants, the themes I decided were relevant and even the theoretical frameworks I chose.[65]

Due to my family's history of immigration I do not have a deep attachment to Mexico and I was keen to know how somebody becomes national. It was also born from a desire to better understand those parts of my identity that since I was a teenager have become the most important for me and yet I have not yet fully assumed. I grew up in a mixed faith family (Catholic-Jewish), in which everyone has a different understanding of what this means. Although during my childhood I was completely aware of my Jewishness, I was ignorant about what this meant in practice and have only vague memories of my more observant relatives. So, my academic quest for understanding Jewishness and Israeliness that started in high school was born much more from a desire of knowing who I was than of who was the 'other'.

It was not until 2008 that I was first able to go to Israel. The trip, sponsored by the Israeli government as I previously explained, made my relationship with Israel much more complicated that it had been before. I knew I had only seen what people wanted me to see, but the extreme protection and surveillance were not enough to protect me from difficult experiences in the airport, and a vibrant and confusing day in the old Jerusalem as it was Ramadan and Rosh-Hashanah at the time. After that trip, I obsessively tried to understand

[64] Wendy Luttrell. "Good Enough Methods for Life-Story Analysis" Naomi Quinn ed. 2005. *Finding Culture in Talk.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 243.
[65] *Loc. cit.*

not only Israeli politics but Israeli culture and society. I went back to study Hebrew and saw all the Israeli and Jewish films available in Mexico. During my last year in college I made some Israeli friends who were living in Mexico and my relationship with them allowed me to explore their identity but also mine, much more.

By the time I started my MA I was keen to study Israel's food culture, but I was not aware that food studies could be a legitimate academic field. My MA allowed me to explore different disciplines and methodological approaches and after a few months I decided to begin a PhD in Anthropology of the Middle East, focusing on Israeli food culture.

The first months of this research were complicated as I had to become familiar with key food anthropology texts and methodology. But as was to be expected, my fieldwork was much more challenging that I had ever thought. My situation as an insider-outsider anthropologist made my fieldwork particularly complicated. Because I had never belonged to the Jewish community in Mexico and I had never practiced Judaism formally, I felt like an imposter constantly even when I clearly explained my family roots to my Israeli friends and participants. My political views further complicated my situation as I was well aware that most of my informants were expecting me to share their views with them and on many occasions, that was not the case.

During the first part of my fieldwork in 2015, I met a British student Rabbi that was enrolled on my Hebrew courses. After several conversations he convinced me to start attending a Jewish Liberal synagogue in London and I followed his advice. This made me much more comfortable with my own identity, and allowed me to return to the field in 2016 with more confidence in myself and my own position in it. I felt I belonged to the wider Jewish community, and I felt more comfortable with my religious knowledge. Although my Jewishness, my religious and historical knowledge was policed and overseen by some of my informants, I felt more at ease, and was able to navigate these situations with more assertiveness.

In September of 2017, and just two weeks before submitting this dissertation and a month before giving birth to my son, I "affirmed" my Jewish faith and officially became a member of a Liberal Synagogue in North London. However, attending the synagogue; having Jewish friends and practicing Judaism in London did not made my relationship with Israel easier. Because I felt accepted by the community in London I felt more comfortable with my own political opinions and my writing became more openly critical. Consequently, some of

the relationships I built during my fieldwork became more distant and the work I did during 2017 was much more difficult than my fieldwork in 2016. However, I deeply identified with some of my participants, with similar mixed backgrounds, and I was able to notice that having a paper that "certifies" your identity made us much more comfortable with breaking rules, eating non-kosher food and speaking our minds.

In my personal life "Teach me how to eat like an Israeli" became a "Teach me how to be Jewish" and I believe my choice of ethnographic vignettes and even the chronology of this thesis are a reflection of my own position in the field. From historical knowledge to a much more vivid and personal image of Israel as well as the inclusion of a chapter on Palestinian and Mizrahi food, this dissertation not only allowed me to explore how national identity is constructed in the everyday but the fluidity and dynamism of political, national and religious identities.

Methodology

My ambition is to study the kitchen as a nationalist space and to concentrate on food not only as a cultural and symbolic artefact but as a political tool where women feed the nationalistic imagination of the community by cooking and passing on recipes. My dissertation contributes to the field of food anthropology by demonstrating and analysing not only the active role of the everyday in constructing national identities but the role of women in the construction of national identities through food culture. A historical study of official documents and publication by itself will not be able to reveal the practices and discourse of the everyday as the documents do not normally record what happens in the private sphere. Therefore, I decided to use ethnographic data and food-centred life stories to be able to explore the unheard voices of ordinary Israelis, especially female Israelis and their relationship with the nation and its food culture. The use of this method has allowed me to understand the context in which food discourse was constructed in Israel as well as its negotiation and reproduction in the contemporary household.

Initially, I planned my research as multi-sited ethnography. I established my presence in several cities and different locations and I moved constantly between them. During the seven months that I spent in Israel between 2015 and 2016 I lived in several cities including Haifa, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Ranana and Kfar Saba. Following the work of George E. Marcus, I

used a "follow the people" and a "follow the thing" technique.[66] These techniques refer to the way that, as an ethnographer, I structured my field work and established my presence in it. I went to those places in which "the thing", in this case food, could present regional differences due to demographic and social differences. But I also followed my participants' connections, I followed the people and their life, their family and work connections moving from one city to another. However, after several months of research I couldn't find significant regional food culture differences. I was only able to find differences connected to social class, ethnicity and education levels. The differences among Mizrahi and Ashkenazi culinary traditions were the most salient ones and they will be constantly highlighted in the thesis. In an interview in 2015 with Gil Hovav, a famous food journalist, he confirmed by suspicions: in terms of food there were no regional differences apart from the ones between urban and rural spaces, a topic that I explore in Chapter 3.

Israel is a small country and people commute constantly between cities. On some occasions, spending the day with my participants meant starting in Ranana, having lunch in Tel Aviv and ending the day at a birthday celebration at Haifa. Members of the families I worked with lived in one city, while their children attended schools in another and the grandparents that picked them up took them to a third town. Staying in one place would have meant ignoring the way Israelis lived their everyday, an everyday that is defined by constant movement, train and car rides.

However, this meant that my knowledge of Israel varied in intensity and quality.[67] I became more familiar with Haifa, Tel Aviv, Kfar Saba and Ranana's geography than with Jerusalem; a city which I visit frequently but had no participants living there. I conducted participant observation in all of these places. Depending of the participants and their circumstances, the participant observation took different forms. I lived with families for extended periods of time in Tel Aviv, Ranana and Kfar Saba. I shopped, cooked, baked, ate, visited family, celebrate birthdays and holidays, and shared their everyday life with them. Sharing their everyday life also meant long conversations in cars. Traffic is a serious problem in Israel, and spending one or two hours a day on a highway is common. The constant movement between cities makes the situation worse and therefore some of the most

[66] George E. Marcus. 1995 "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography", *Annual Review of Anthropology,* 24.: 105.
[67] George E. Marcus. *Op. cit.* p.100.

valuable conversations I had were in cars, on the way from picking up children from school, attending a family gathering or barbecue, or looking for specific varieties of strawberries.

The connections that my participants had allowed me to understand better the way food and people moved around Israel and how they imagined the country in terms of space. "This is a really small country" was a phrase constantly repeated to me not only to justify Israel expansionism but also to explain the way through which they structured the space they inhabit. I noticed then that I was treating my field as one and my research not as a multi-sited ethnography but as one that had Israel as one site. This was possible due to the geographical characteristics of the country, the way my participants moved in the field and how I structured my research.

Therefore, I selected my participants based not on their locations but considering their education level, social class, ethnicity, and religion. My participants have defined themselves as Ashkenazi, Iraqi, Yemenite, Israeli, Hungarian and Russian. Except for the immigrants that I mention in Chapter 4, all of them defined themselves as Jewish; some of them call themselves *hiloni* (secular), and others *mazorti* (literally traditionalist). The division between secular Jewish and religious participants in a country that defines itself as Jewish, are blurry. I use the terms the way my participants did; in some cases, my own perceptions of the terms did not match their use of the words but I respected the way they wanted to be portraited. This was particularly salient when talking about kosher practices, as many of them defined themselves as secular, and however kept kosher by rationalizing and attaching different meanings to these religious laws.

All of my participants were middle-class Israelis, with different education levels and with different upbringings. Some grew up in kibbutzim (collective farms), others in cities. Some had spent long periods of time living abroad while others had never lived outside the country. I followed a "snowball" technique and I decided to explore the networks of my participants as much as I could. This took me from Tel Aviv, where I found my initial participants, to Haifa and from Haifa to central Israel.

Most of my participants were unable to or unwilling to have an anthropologist living with them. However, they were happy to have me visiting them two to three times per week, or to stay with them over the weekend. All of them invited me to spend Friday night dinner with them, and I did that at least once with each of the families participating. In Haifa, I lived

on the university campus and I visited my participants constantly, spending time with them cooking, eating, shopping and visiting cafes.

It was my intention to include ultra-orthodox families in this research. However, I only found one family willing to have me for a day and they decided not to have me at the last minute. Although my ethnography does include one Modern Orthodox participant, I recognise that this limits my work to the secular part of the Israeli population. Nonetheless, even among seculars there are thousands of different ways to understand the nation, making it clear that Israel is not a monolithic culture.

Apart from participant observation, I conducted semi-structured interviews with food journalists, historians, publishers and food celebrities in Israel. My main focus was female participants. My research benefited particularly from what Carole Counihan calls *food-centred life stories.*[68] Counihan defines these as "semi-structured tape-recorded interviews with willing participants, on their beliefs and behaviours surrounding food production, preparation, distribution and consumption".[69] Most of my participants, especially those that had food related jobs in television or writing preferred not to be tape-recorded so in the majority of my interviews I took notes. However, the methodology and aims I had in these interviews were similar to Counihan's description of her own research. I payed particular attention to how women constructed their narratives, the language they preferred to use in the interviews, the coherence of discourse as well as the diversions they took from the questions I asked.[70] The conversations we had where mostly located at the houses of my interviewees allowing me to analyse the food I was offered, the place in the house where the interview took place. Additionally, I had the aim of giving a voice to women that are normally not considered in the official narratives of Israel. This is particularly clear in Chapter 2 and 3 in which female narratives of life in the first decades of the State of Israel as well as in the kibbutz challenge the accounts that have contributed to the myth of gender equality in Israel. Food-centred life histories also allowed me to explore the impact of the public sphere in the identity- formation process and private life of my female participants as well as to understand

[68] Carole Counihan. 2013. "*Mexicanas'* Food Voice and Differential Consciousness in the San Luis Valley of Colorado", in Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik [ed]. *Food and Culture, a Reader.* Third edition, New York-London: Routledge. p.173.
[69] *Ibid.* p.174.
[70] Wendy Luttrell. 2005. "Good Enough Methods for Life-Story Analysis" Naomi Quinn ed. *Finding Culture in Talk.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan p.248.

the role that food policies, migration, scarcity and religion had in their culinary practices. As Counihan points out, this method allowed me to gather information that otherwise was inaccessible to me.[71] It allowed me to record female food experiences in different historical periods of Israel and to have a better picture of the food culture of the country.

Although most Israelis believe they have achieved a higher level of equality between men and women than in most countries of the West, and than in all the countries of the Middle East; women still carry out most of the work related to food, including planning menus, shopping, and cooking. The focus of this dissertation became mainly about domestic cooking and women became its main focus as a result. Although Israeli society was built over ideals of gender equality where women were partners in the construction of the nation there is still a lot of work to be done in terms of gender equality. A clear example of the lack of equality is the prohibition of women praying in certain areas of the Western Wall. In terms of domestic work, all my female participants did most of the cooking and cleaning work while their parents took care of their grandchildren. This allows women to be fully integrated in the workforce, however, they continue being housemakers, and in charge of all the daily cooking. In the words of one of my participants, having more than three children, a full-time job and preparing a full Friday dinner and Saturday lunch every week is what should be known as "motherhood Israeli style."

The Israeli state constantly emphasise the work that women do in fundamental state institutions like the army. However, the study of Israel's domestic sphere demostrates that domestic tasks like cooking everyday meals are still in the hands of women and not usually shared with men. Women are part of the national project, but from what we can call the "home front" and their aportations to the nation focus on handling a household. As a country that defines itself as family-oriented those tasks are seen as fundamental for the survival of the nationand its core values, and have given certain degree of power to women by constructing matriarchal families where women are able to exercise a considerable amount of influence over members of the family, the decisions they take and the way they understand their nation. I spent a lot of time alone with women while they were cooking, or drinking coffee or shopping, but in the context of the participant observation I carried out, I worked with the entirety of families, including the male members. I conducted non-structure and

[71]Carole Counihan. 2013. *Opc.it.* p.181.

semi-structured interviews when possible with all the adult members of the families participating in the study although female participants were more willing to take part in the study and to share their life stories.

Food in different settings: chapter structure

The chapter structure of my dissertation has the aim of first providing the reader with a historical perspective that highlights the role of elites in the construction of a national food culture and secondly a contemporary analysis based on ethnographic data that emphasises how ordinary people negotiate those impositions. This structure allows me to present a more complete analysis were the interaction between elites and non-elites in the process of constructing a national identity becomes clearer.

As previously mentioned, in the second and third chapter of the dissertation, I present a historical account that focuses on the way in which the Israeli authorities intervened in the creation of a national food culture. I emphasise how the Ashkenazi elite tried to impose a hegemonic diet that would "melt" together the different culinary traditions of the Jewish immigrants while ignoring the Palestinian and regional influence. In these chapters, it is particularly clear how food choices can reveal the commitment to the nation and how, through them, ordinary people can construct an idea of nation. It is also evident that nationhood is not only constructed by elites but negotiated by ordinary people in their everyday routines. In both chapters, the role of women is fundamental to understanding how nationalism is reproduced in the private sphere and in order to contrast it with the official narratives I use the data I gathered through the food-centred life stories method.

In Chapter 2 I analyse how the women of the pre-state period and first decades after the declaration of Independence, negotiated the role as reproducers and feeders of the nation that the authorities had imposed on them by choosing to put their families' needs first and breaking the austerity roles. In Chapter 3 I will point out the way in which food culture was developed in Israel in the cities and in rural communities, and the differences and communalities among them. In the case of the rural communities I look specifically at how practices like baking became a tool by which women could manifest their individuality and resist the way authorities expected them to fill their national duties. Simultaneously, I analyse how the post-socialist period and the openness to new markets changed the urban food

culture of Israel. I highlight the need for Israelis to achieve what they saw as "normality", anidea imported from the West and that reflected the social, economic and political changes on the country.

In Chapter 4 I discuss why Israelis explore the relationship between religion, the everyday and the official discourse of the Jewish state. I start with a brief analysis of the legal history of kosher laws in Israel with the aim of setting this as a general historical background for the rest of the dissertation. In a country in which Jewishness is at the centre of national identity, the practical aspects of this identity show different ways of performing the nation. For some of my participants, following these dietary restrictions is a way to practically showcase their alliance to the state, while for others, breaking them has become an act of resistance against the control that religious authorities have over the citizens of the country, including over their bodies. Therefore, I interpret the decision to follow dietary restrictions in Israel not only as a symbol of religious observance but as one of political convictions. Breaking them occasionally can also be seen as a "redemptive movement" and as a way to reveal the status quo without breaking social conventions.

In Chapter 5, following the analysis suggested by Jonathan Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss, I focus on the performance of the nation paying particular attention to rituals performed in the home as well as in the public sphere. The importance of these events, like Passover that is mainly celebrated in the home; in the same way that Thanksgiving resides in their capacity to reproduce the nation in the private sphere, far away from public celebrations and the symbolism that is embedded in them. Those symbols can change their meaning according to the time or people using them (from religious to national), and provide the imagined community with symbols that can be interpreted differently by the members of the nation.[72] The symbolic importance of the celebration of Passover is key for the reproduction of the Israeli identity. Through it, the history of Jewish slavery and transformation into a nation is placed as the foundation of the new Israeli nation and helps Israelis perceive themselves as part of a national community with deep historical roots.[73] I decided to analyse these highly ritualized events as part of the everyday as these celebrations take place mainly in the home, in the domestic sphere, they do not break routines, on the contrary, they mark

[72] *Ibid.*p. 9.
[73] Gabriella Elgenious. 2011. *Symbols of Nations and Nationalism,* London: Palgrave Macmillan. p.17.

the time, and become part of the eventfulness of the everyday. As well as in the rest of the chapters of this dissertation, when analysing food culture, the importance of women is particularly salient and in this case, their role as gatekeepers of tradition is a fundamental one.

In Chapter 6 I focus on Friday Night dinners. Although in the diaspora, Friday night dinners are religious celebrations; in the Israeli household, they are family gatherings perceived by my participants as the opportunity to see all the family and enjoy a nice meal. Because these occasions are no longer religious in some households they have been exchanged for a Saturday lunch often in the form of a barbecue. The Friday night dinner or Saturday lunch are perceived by many of my participants as a key trend of Israeli food culture and an occasion that underlines the importance of the family for their idea of what being Israeli means. Through the chapter I analyse the way in which these occasions are used by female members of the family to not only perform the nation but transmit the values they believe the nation holds as the most precious ones. I also explore how women exert influence over the members of their family and close circle by distributing leftovers. Their influence becomes key for the process of identity formation, especially for newcomers; either children or immigrants that learn how to be national and behave as an Israeli from their mothers and mothers-in-law.

Chapter 7 focuses on the influence of Palestinian food in Israel's food culture. The chapter discusses how Palestinian food has been de-nationalized and renamed as Arab or Middle Eastern food to be later appropriated and consumed by Israelis. I will then refute the idea that Israeli cuisine is the result of a 'melting pot' process and suggest that, it is the product of what I'll define as creolization, a process much more complex and violent. Choosing, consuming and talking the nation will be particularly clear through this chapter as with their choice of restaurants, and in the way Israelis converse about the Arab or Palestinian food they show their political preferences, the way they define the borders of their national community.

Together, these chapters illustrate how food culture shows the way different members of society understand the nation and how they talk, perform, choose, and consume it. They emphasise the way ordinary people, in their everyday routines, negotiate with the elites about what it means to be national and to become active agents of the construction of the nation.

Chapter 2. Learning to eat as an Israeli

I met Hava on a hot day in April 2015. She offered me a sweetened iced coffee and some sugar biscuits and immediately after she started slowly talking to me in Hebrew. "I hope you are ready, I have a lot to say so if it's too much you just stop me" she said. At first, I thought she was saying this because we were speaking in a mix of English and Hebrew and she was worried she was speaking too quickly. However, after half an hour I realized she was concerned about how I was going to handle the stories she was going to tell me, not about her speed in telling them. She was nervous, and it was obvious her memories were sometimes painful, nevertheless she decided to narrate them in great detail.

Hava was born in Israel, but her family was originally from Hungary and left after the Holocaust. She grew up in a kibbutz in the fifties, and after a few years living in Tel Aviv, she moved to a Moshav[1] where she still lives with her husband. She shared with me her food memories of those first years of the State of Israel, and she constantly talked about scarcity, hunger, and the obsession of her parents and her husband's family about becoming real Israelis. The diet and cooking practices of her family became fundamental to her own identity, even when both her Ashkenazi family and her husband's Mizrahi[2] family decided to leave behind the flavours of the diaspora. But the reasons for wanting to forget the flavours and smells of their past were different for both families: while Hava's Hungarian parents left their European food practices in the past because they did not know how to cook the food of the old world and were only able to remember the smells of their grandmother kitchens; the Iraqi family of her husband left their practices as they were perceived as backwards and unhealthy and unworthy of their new life in Israel. As time went by, both families tried to recover their cooking roots. Hava's Hungarian family to remember lost loved ones; while the Iraqi family of her husband wanted to show their pride in their culture.

Cookbooks were fundamental, not only in remembering those lost recipes and techniques but also when the families arrived in Israel; to forget their previous diets and food ways.

[1] Similar to a kibbutz, a Moshav is a rural community that shares services but not profit. Each member owns a piece of land and keeps the profits.

[2] Mizrahi Jews: a label given in Israel to those Jews who emigrated from a Middle Eastern country. Most of them are Sephardim (Spanish Jews expelled in 1492).

Hava remembered with detail the food she grew up eating in the kibbutz, what her mother baked and the first time her father finally cooked a goulash. She now eats Iraqi food cooked by her husband during holidays and family gatherings. In her own words "it is ok now to eat Mizrahi food, you are still an Israeli. In the beginning, we had to eat grey Polish food or poorly cooked kibbutz food. Now, things are different".

Hava's food memories illustrate the story of how Israeli food culture came to be and the attempt to construct a homogenous Israeli diet that was part of the identity of the New Hebrew man. As I will analyse in this chapter, the process of building this unique new diet was not easy, and in the end, it did not succeed. As Orzit Rozin affirms, food is so basic that it is easier for immigrants to give up their language than their food.[3] Israel´s immigrants were not the exception. The Jewish communities that arrived to pre-Mandate Palestine in the last decades of the nineteenth century from Europe, Russia, Ethiopia, India and the Middle East, took with them their traditions, ways of life and their food. Once they arrived in Israel, the differences between them became obvious and problematic for a leadership that wanted to build a unified nation. With the aim of "melting" together those cultures, cookbooks were written and radio programmes transmitted. The audience was female, and the government gave women the task to build a new national identity from within the home, all with the aim of changing the diasporic diets of the past. Women, the guardians of Jewish traditions were now expected to also be the agents of change and to provide their services to the nation by shopping and cooking only what the national establishment approved.

Each community arriving confronted different problems. While Ashkenazi women were told to forget the food of the diaspora as it was not suitable for their new climate, Mizrahi women were told their cooking was unhealthy and not nutritious enough. In this chapter, I will argue that the Zionist authorities, constituted mainly by European Jews tried to impose a hegemonic collective identity in which the differences between the immigrants were less visible, at least at the table. Thus, the imposed food policies were intended to provoke not only that people peacefully "blend together" but also their culinary traditions. The first step towards this "melting" of traditions was to eliminate national differences among the communities arriving and to simplify the divisions into two simpler categories: European

[3] Orzit Rozin. 2006. "Food, Identity and Nation-Building in Israel´s Formative Years". *Israel Studies Forum* 21(1), p.53.

and Oriental Jews.[4] The food and even health practices of the European Jews were seen as more civilized and the Mizrahi Jews—like Hava's husband's family—had to leave behind their food traditions in order to become "authentic Israelis". Therefore, the melting pot ideal was never achieved, as the Hebrew identity that the authorities wanted to create and that was based on European ideals, was not accepted intact by the population and was negotiated and even resisted.

In order to demonstrate my argument, in this chapter, as well as in the following one, I will present an examination of a sample of cookbooks in chronological order of publication and classified according to their aims, together with the food-centred life stories that I gathered during my research. The cookbooks represent in this case an official narrative of how authorities wanted Israeli tables to be, while the narratives of my participants present how these discourses were lived, accepted or contested in the everyday. Feminist scholarship only started to use cookbooks as historical documents until recently. They had been overlooked for decades as Western feminism saw them as instruments of women's oppression. Barbara Harber, responsible for developing the cookbook collection at Schlesinger Library at Harvard University's Radcliffe Institute for Advance Studies, was confronted by her colleagues that argued that cookbooks, as oppressive tools, should not be part of a library dedicated to women's history.[5]

Although it is true that cookbooks have been used as ways to instruct women in their domestic duties they are fundamental documents to understand not only the stories of women, but the aspirations and values of communities and nations and the way people would like their kitchens, tables and families to look.

The sample I present here allow us to understand more of the political context of Israel as well as family structures, food policies, stereotypes, society conflicts and ethnic difference. Although as Ken Albala sustains, cookbooks rarely reveal what people *actually* eat they "reflect the kind of technical and cultural elaboration we grace with the term cuisine, they are likely to be representations not only of structures of production and distribution and of social

[4] Aziza Khazzoom. 2003. "The Great Chain of Orientalism: Jewish Identity, Stigma Management and Ethnic Exclusion in Israel" *American Sociological Review* 68 (4) p.462.
[5] Barbara Harber and Arlene Voski Avakian. 2005. "Preface" in Barbara Harber et al. *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies,* Massachussetts: University of Massachussetts press, p.7.

and cosmological schemes, but class and hierarchy".[6] The books I analyse in the following sections were not chosen arbitrarily; their selection is based on the date of publications, how popular they were and also if they were still remembered by my informants. They are part of the official food discourse of the time in which they were published and are useful tools for understanding the ideology of their times.

The cookbooks

The first task confronted by the European Zionists in their attempt to build a new nation in Mandate Palestine was to construct a unique collective identity that highlighted their connection not only between the land and their new inhabitants but among the different Jewish communities that were arriving at their Old-New Homeland. The task was not easy, as hundreds of years in the diaspora had left little connection among the immigrants and it seemed that only religious symbols could sustain the idea that once, they had been one nation. Their diets and food preferences were not the exception, the diet of Polish Jews had nothing in common with the diet of Yemenite Jews and even among Jews from the same regions cooking practices varied, and class differences were visible. Again, it was only dietary, religious restrictions that marked some common food trends among the population, but even those were kept in different ways. In order to construct a national culture and identity, the Zionist establishment used different tactics to homogenize the population and to create that New Hebrew man that left the diaspora in the past. To achieve this, the elites followed melting pot ideals and applied policies that were supposed to mix all the cultural trends of the Jewish population and to build a new identity.

The Melting Pot, or the "ingathering of exiles" became a political symbol used by the Zionist authorities to justify the politics of Europeanization applied to the non-European Jewish communities. The Melting pot idea became popular in 1908 in the United States when Israel Zangwill showed for the first time his play titled "The Melting Pot".[7] Although the process suggested a melting of cultures in reality, it became one of "Anglo-conformity", through which immigrants were taught English and advised to leave their foreign ways in the

[6] Ken Albala.2012. "Cookbooks as historical documents" in, Jeffrey Pilcher [Ed] *The Oxford Handbook of History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.231

[7] Philip Gleason. 1964. "The Melting Pot: Symbol of Fusion or Confusion?", *American Quarterly.* 16(1), p.22.

past.[8] The theatre play was based on the idea that in order to build a new nation, immigrants had to leave their old ways in the past and produce a new national man.[9] Interestingly enough, the melting pot became controversial among American Jews as it implied a process of complete assimilation, a voluntary one in fact, and the play did suggest that those Jews that did not want to assimilate should work for the foundation of a Jewish state. [10]

In Israel, the melting pot meant the "ideal of melting or uniting different people of diverse national backgrounds into a new nation […] Melting pot in the Zionist context has been an ethical and mythical expression of creating a national society evolving on its historical territory through the ingathering, as well as the integration of the exiles".[11] However, similarly to what happened in the United States, the melting pot in Israel mostly implied the Europeanization of the immigrants from the Middle East and Africa, and as I will explain in detail in Chapter 7 the melting pot was, in reality, a process of creolization, that was not simple or voluntary but violent and complicated.

The "ingathering of exiles" also meant the creation of a New Hebrew man that aspired to be "healthy, muscular, a warrior, industrious, hard-working, rational-modern, Western, secular, a vernacular, accentless Hebrew speaker, educated, obedient to authorities, not intellectual. The offspring of Ashkenazi immigrants".[12] This New Hebrew, had to be superior in every way to the diasporic Jew, he was depicted frequently as a farmer, working the Land of Israel, a true Zionist.[13] And this man (he was imagined always as masculine) although he had left the European diaspora behind, was somebody that looked more to the West than to the East, as it had been imagined by European Jews that saw themselves as civilized, especially in contrast with the Oriental Jew. This new man, was an ideal borrowed from the Soviet Union and was part of the Zionists' rejection of the exile, an ideal that was frequently imposed on the new immigrants by force.[14]

A fundamental part of the invention of this New Hebrew implied changing his health and eating habits. For this aim, cookbooks became a fundamental tool. Written by and for

[8] Charles Hirschman. 1983. "Melting Pot Reconsidered", *Annual Review of Sociology.* 9. p.398.
[9] Philip Gleason. *loc. cit.*
[10] *Ibid.* p.27.
[11] Yosef Gorny. 2001. "The Melting Pot in Zionist Thought", *Israeli Studies*, 6(3). p.55.
[12] Baruch Kimmerling, 2001. *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness.* Los Angeles: University of California Press. p.101.
[13] Tom Segev, 2002. *Elvis in Jerusalem: Post Zionism and the Americanization of Israel.* Trans. Haim Watzman. New York: Metropolitan Books. p.26
[14] *Ibid*.p.25.

housewives, the cookbooks not only reflect the aspirations of the Zionist institutions and the ideal diet they wanted to achieve, but also the way women were expected to contribute to the nation in their everyday life. According to Atsuko Ichijo and Ronald Ranta that new diet "was to be rich in fruits, fresh vegetables and dairy products rather than the Jewish Eastern European diet of fish, meat and boiled vegetables. The inspiration for many of the new dishes and food ingredients came from imitating and adapting elements from the local Arab-Palestinian food culture".[15] However, those Palestinian elements were appropriated, and their Arab character stripped from them.

At the time cookbooks not only provided women with recipes but were instructional manuals, part of a normative discourse that reinforced gender roles. Some of these books were complete household manuals; they explained how to use certain domestic equipment, how to keep a house in order and how to adapt to the weather and conditions of Palestine. According to Arjun Appadurai, cookbooks are a humble literature genre that "reflect shifts in the boundaries of edibility, the proprieties of the culinary process, the logic of meals, the exigencies of the household budget, the vagaries of the market, and the structure of domestic ideologies."[16]

In the sample I present here, the shifts Israeli food culture went through in the first decades and even before the establishment of the State, and how they mirror the social and political changes of society will be evident. Cookbooks are historical documents, narratives that can be read and interpreted in thousands of ways. Although they do not necessarily reflect the realities of society, they show how certain cultural brokers—among them the state and its institutions or diasporic communities—imagine the family and the home. Cookbooks reflect the aspirations of society, how people wish their families, dinners, and homes to look; the flavours they want to taste, who they feel they are and who they don't want to be. They also show the reader social structures and in the case of Israel they replicate the obsession with building a unique identity as well as the way in which the European Jews imagined their Middle Eastern counterparts.

[15] Atsuko Ichijo and Ronald Ranta. 2016. *Food, National Identity and Nationalism from Everyday to Global Politics*, Hampshire-New York, Palgrave MacMillan. p.98.
[16] Arjun Appadurai. 1988. "How to make a national cuisine: cookbooks in contemporary India." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. p.3.

Israeli cookbooks not only displayed the ideal way of eating and cooking of the time but the ways in which women were expected to feed their families, do their shopping and cook in their home. The first cookbooks published during the times of Mandate Palestine were used as educational and political instruments, for teaching Hebrew for example, and to explain to women what their nationalist duties in the home front were. Of course, the publication of cookbooks implies literacy among their target population[17], but in the case of Israel, it could not assume they were Hebrew speakers, for this reason some of them were written in English and German. The cookbooks target a European and a Middle Eastern female audience. On the one hand, they aim to instruct the Middle Eastern Jewish women in how to properly nurture their children, as their traditional diets were perceived by European Jews as unhealthy. On the other hand, European women were expected to learn how to cook with the local ingredients and introduce fresh vegetables to their diet.

These cookbooks also show the ideal of womanhood embedded in the Zionist ideology, and how women were expected to behave in their new society. Women were expected to be loyal companions, devoted mothers and wives in order to gain a place in the Zionist society. As the cookbooks reflect, every decision they made in the kitchen and the market became a decision of national importance, the olive oil chosen was not only a matter of domestic economics but of loyalty to their new country. Those instructional handbooks were not only written for women but by women that had decided that their duty in helping in the building of the new nation was educating other women on how to carry out their everyday tasks in a patriotic way. The authors were educated Western women, some of them with Home Economics university qualifications and, in some cases, they were married to committed Zionists. They saw shopping and cooking as the Zionist duties of women. Their cookbooks reflect the aim of improving women's skills in the household and in particular in the kitchen, making these traditional feminine tasks a contribution to the nationalist movement. Cookbooks became an instrument to nationalized the domestic space, to give another dimension to the home as a "multiple site[18]" and to transform women into agents of change. Therefore, analysing those cookbooks, provides us with a useful insight into how Israeli food culture was born through mundane, repetitive everyday habits that are the

[17] Atsuko Ichijo and Ronald Ranta. *Loc. cit.*
[18] Tim Edensor. 2002. *National identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, Oxford-New York: Berg, p.5.

outcome of the implicit negotiation between official governmental, cultural impositions and domestic practices.

Cookbooks were published mainly by female Zionist associations. Since the last decades of the nineteenth century, diverse female associations have become part of the European Zionist effort to build a new national Hebrew identity. Jewish women's organizations in the West—especially in America and the United Kingdom—felt it was their responsibility to train and help Jewish women living in Mandate Palestine to perform their nationalist duties. Among theses duties were shopping, cooking and feeding their families or members of the kibbutz. For that purpose, they established cookery and agricultural schools in pioneer settlements and in Tel Aviv.[19] Soon they also started to publish cookbooks, newspaper columns and pamphlets promoting the use of local ingredients and certain ideas of health.

The most famous women´s organization was devoted to training women with the aim of helping them to develop the skills necessary for their new life in the new society. This organization, which still exists and is still active in Israel and in other countries of the world, was the Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO). It was founded in London in 1920 by Rebecca Sieff, wife of Israel Sieff, the Zionist movement's Political Secretary, Dr. Vera Weizmann, wife of the Zionist movement President Chaim Weizmann, and Edith Eder, wife of Zionist leader Dr. Eder.[20] As we can see from the positions held by the husbands of the funders, WIZO was not an organization separated from its male counterpart; it was part of the European Zionist establishment. The founders were members of a Zionist committee that visited Palestine in 1918. Shocked by the conditions women endured in Palestine, particularly in the agricultural settlements where there was no proper housing and climate conditions were hard, they decided to found an organization which directed their aims to the improvement of the quality of life of immigrant women in Israel.[21] The purpose of the organization was not to fight for women´s rights and equality in the Zionist movement but to give them the necessary tools to fulfil the tasks that the nation expected of them. It was a

[19] Yael Raviv, 2015. *Falafel Nation.* Lincoln-London: University of Nebraska Press. p.45.
[20] WIZO, n.d. *WIZO.* www.wizo.org Accessed 5 September 2014.
[21] *Loc. cit.*

Zionist organization, and saw the establishment of a Jewish state as its first and main goal, while the position and role of women in an eventual Jewish state took a secondary place.[22]

WIZO became the first institution that tried to establish a national diet by teaching women how to cook with the technology and the ingredients available in Mandate Palestine. WIZO founded schools around the country to train women in different aspects of the everyday life of the country. They gave professional advice to women in the kitchen of kibbutzim on how to use and cook the ingredients available, and how to cook in large quantities. One of the instruments they used to educate women were cookbooks and newspaper columns. As will be analysed in detail later in this chapter, WIZO was one of the organizations that published recipe books in the first half of the twentieth century. As mentioned before, these cookbooks had clear educational goals and were part of the melting pot policies of the time.

Following this policy, through their cookbooks, WIZO encouraged women to modify their customs and to adopt what was constructed as a "healthier" diet based on fresh vegetables and fruit like aubergines, marrows, and citrus as well as other native ingredients like olive oil and fresh cheese. They pointed out the political and national responsibility they had and how choosing ingredients and feeding their families had an impact on the development of the nation.

Another fundamental organization of the time was founded in 1912 by Henrietta Szold and known as Hadassah: The Women´s Zionist Organization of America.[23] Hadassah started by sending pasteurized milk to infants as a way to solve the diseases that were related to child malnutrition.[24] As well as WIZO, Hadassah visited kibbutzim with the aim of changing food habits and teaching women how to cook and serve food to their families properly. Until that point, one of the main problems in the kibbutzim dining rooms was the monotony of food and the lack of knowledge the cooks had of how to cook with the ingredients available to them. Hadassah and WIZO tried to change this by teaching the women in the kitchens how to cook for large numbers and how to avoid serving the same dishes every day, even when they had a small variety of ingredients. It took a long time for the food of the kibbutzim to improve

[22] *Loc. cit.*
[23] Yael Raviv, *op. cit.,* p.97.
[24] *Loc. cit.*

as kitchen duties were not fixed, and the trained cooks did not hold their post long.[25] Hadassah also published a series of ten booklets called "Guide for Family Nutrition" that had the aim of helping women to successfully handle their homes during the years of the Second World War.[26]

These organizations, together with government campaigns, promoted the consumption of Israeli products and shaped, through their health, shopping and cooking suggestions, the Israeli diet. At this point, it is important to take into account that the goal of these organizations was not to improve the political and social positions of female immigrants but to give them the tools to become more efficient in their domestic duties; responsibilities deemed of great importance for the nation. Although is never explicitly stated, the positions of the female writers were in some cases different to the social and cultural position of those who were using the cookbooks. In most cases the writers were educated upper middle-class women that had not been persecuted in the United States or Great Britain and had urban lives in Israel; conversely, some of the readers—one can imagine—arrived in Israel as the consequence of discrimination and some of them lived in the kibbutzim or settlements, making their situation substantially different to that of the authors. This silence or omission in the cookbooks about the class and origin of their audience reflects again the ideology of the time; Zionism not only wanted to erase ethnic divisions but also class differences, and omitting any reference to such differences was consistent with the illusion of a socialist melting pot.

In the next section, I will analyse a sample of the cookbooks and how the attention given to dietary changes reflected the Zionist ideology of the first years of the state and their willingness to modify their Jewish identity in order to construct a modern Hebrew society.

How to cook in Palestine

The first three aliyahot[27] that arrived in Palestine established the foundations of the future State of Israel. They were the first builders and ideologists behind the dream of creating a New Hebrew identity. In the following decades, the immigrations waves continued and little

[25] *Ibid.*p.92.
[26] Ofra Tene, 2015. "The New Immigrant Must Not Only Learn, He Most Also Forget." In *Jews and their Foodways*, edited by Anat Helman, [kindle edition]. New York: Oxford University Press. Loc. 1553.
[27] Waves of Jewish immigration to Palestine beginning at the end of the nineteenth century.

by little Jewish communities from the Middle East started to make their way to Israel, especially after the establishment of the State in 1948 and as a consequence of the wars with neighbouring Arab countries. Not all of the new immigrants were Zionists. Most of them were refugees, that had to leave their countries due to persecution. From the Middle Eastern Jews, is impossible to say how many went to Israel due to their own convictions, as most of them were forced to leave their countries and had no other option but to go to the new Jewish state.[28]

In order to absorb and integrate newcomers into the Jewish society in Palestine, different policies were implemented, including those directed at women and concerned with diet, shopping, and cooking. WIZO and Hadassah started publishing newspaper columns and cookbooks directed aqt women. How food was produced, consumed, distributed and cooked was of national importance and it was used as an instrument to teach ordinary people their national duties as well as how they were expected to consume, choose and perform the nation.

By 1927, WIZO had a cooking and agricultural school in Tel Aviv[29] and was promoting among urban and rural women a new diet that corresponded to their new society. This new diet was not the local Arab diet nor the Jewish diasporic diet but a New Hebrew one that took elements from their new land and used them to produce healthy and authentic Hebrew food. Nonetheless, at the same time, the unwillingness of East European immigrants to change their own food traditions, which they perceived as healthy and unreproachable, gave birth to the Eretz Israel Ashkenazi Cuisine.[30]

WIZO's first recipe booklets appeared during those years. In 1927, the Instruction Department of WIZO published: *Vegetable dishes; Potato dishes.* In 1928 *Home economics; Broad Beans, Peas and Carrots and Cabbages and Cauliflower*, and in 1929 *A booklet on Baking* and *Citrus recipes.*[31] Merely from the titles of these booklets, it is possible to deduce that a fundamental part of changing the diets of the immigrants consisted of encouraging the consumption of fresh vegetables. East Europeans generally did not eat vegetables other than

[28] Tom Segev, *op. cit.*p.34.
[29] WIZO. *Loc. cit.*
[30] Ofra Tene. *op. cit.*Location 1440.
[31] WIZO, *loc. cit.*

potatoes or cooked vegetables (pickled, for example, but rarely raw)[32], while the Mizrahi populations, had a meat based diet, or at least, that was what the authorities believed.

The campaign *Totzeret ha Eretz* (Made in Israel), also started during those years and was adopted by the Jewish Agency in 1936.The aim of the campaign was to promote products made by Jewish hands and transform the diet of the immigrants. It was directed to the housewives, the ones in charge of shopping and choosing the ingredients for the home.[33] The Zionist institutions told women that it was their national duty to buy products, like olive oil and oranges grown by Jewish hands, even if it was more expensive than the alternative. During the first decades of the British Mandate of Palestine, most vegetables were produced by Arab farmers, and they were cheaper than those produced by Jewish farmers,[34] for this reason homemakers had to be persuaded by nationalist arguments and encouraged to opt out from the cheapest alternative. The aim was also to change the diasporic culture and create a new hegemonic culture where the differences in the communities arriving were not visible anymore, at least not on their tables. Furthermore, the New Hebrew nation had to be economically independent. Therefore, it was vital that their economy, diet and consumption patterns were not attached to the Arab local economy.[35] Agriculture was a fundamental tool in this as it also made the ties to the land stronger and recovered the "original" diet of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel.

WIZO continued its work training women in domestic and agricultural tasks, not only in the kibbutz but in cities and urban spaces. *How to Cook in Palestine?* was published in 1937[36] and it was the first complete cookbook published by WIZO. The book is divided into three parts, each part in a different language: Hebrew, German and English. Each part has the same recipes as the others, although advertisements are only included in the Hebrew part. An interesting variation between the different parts of the book is its title. In English, the book is called *How to Cook in Palestine,* yet in German and Hebrew the word 'Palestine' was substituted for *Eretz Israel.* The book does not provide an explanation for this discrepancy, but a possible explanation is that the editor wanted to avoid conflicts with the British officials

[32] Ofra Tene. *op. cit.*Loc. 1493.
[33] Raviv. *op. cit.* p. 53.
[34] Ofra Tene. *op. cit,* Loc. 1727.
[35] Yonatan Mendel and Ronald Ranta. 2014. "Consuming Palestine: Palestine and Palestinians in Israeli Food Culture." *Ethnicities* 14 (3): p.423.
[36] Dr. Erna Meyer., 1937. *How to cook in Palestine?* Tel Aviv: WIZO.

in the Mandate by using the official name of the land at the time: The British Mandate for Palestine, for the English section. The choice of languages is also interesting. Immigrants were taught to read and write in this Hebrew, as most of the new immigrants did not know it. For this reason, the book also includes a dictionary, making it easier to learn new vocabulary in Hebrew related to the kitchen. German was chosen because it was the language of origin of the author but also because the audience of the book was mainly European. English was the language of the Mandate, thus providing a reason to also include it in the book.

How to Cook in Palestine was written by one of WIZO's domestic scientists Dr. Erna Meyer. Of German origin and an active member of WIZO in Palestine, Dr. Meyer continuously tries to remind the reader of the disadvantages of the European diet in comparison with the benefits offered by cooking with local ingredients such as aubergines, lentils, marrows, olive oil and homemade ketchup. Aware of the problems and challenges that housewives were facing in their "Old-New Homeland" she tells the "intelligent thinking housewife," "not only what to cook but how to cook it using the technology and resources available in Jewish Palestinian kitchens".[37] The author clearly states in the introduction that although she considers herself—as well as her readers—as European housewives: "European habits are not only injurious to the health of the family but, in addition, they burden the housewife with unnecessary work".[38] Meyer understood "European habits" as the use of tinned food, long cooking processes, the high consumption of meat and the scarce presence of fresh dairy products. As is evident from the cookbooks analysed in the following pages, although European food was not necessarily unhealthy, its negative aspects were highlighted in order to convince the housewives that their new way of cooking was not only their only realistic option but also the best one. Her clear intention is to "free the kitchens" from European food by offering methods for cooking and to establish what she considers a healthier and fresher diet. European food was perceived as unhealthy, labour-intensive and inadequate for the climate and circumstances in which they were living, therefore; it was the duty of the housewives to learn a new cuisine that would not only guaranteed the health of her family but ease her domestic duties.[39] Of course, the memory of the immigrants, the recipes that they treasured were not going to be erased easily, as food culture was probably the only thing

[37] See: Dr. Erna Meyer. *Loc. cit*.
[38] *Ibid.* p.5.
[39] *Ibid*.p.6.

they had left from the countries of origin and of the family members they had left behind. As a consequence, the majority of the recipes are not distinctive local Middle Eastern dishes but European recipes cooked and adapted to the ingredients available at that time in the Mandate. Recipes are not detailed, and measurements are not provided, probably because measurement systems varied depending on the country of origin of the reader.

Although Dr. Meyer uses local ingredients for her recipes, she does not copy Arab recipes or imitate local cooking. The idea of the book was to start building a coherent cuisine where "exotic" Middle Eastern ingredients like aubergines were familiar to the pioneers.[40] However, the European diet does not seem to be completely forgotten, at least not in this first attempt. European recipes, although unhealthy and part of "irrational traditions", are included and adapted to the climate and products available, they are "modernized" and adapted to the diet of the ideal of the New Hebrew man, a man that did not cherish tradition and was willing to start a new unattached, modern life. However, the book has a whole section on potato recipes, a food staple among Eastern European Jews and it also includes recipes for goulash and sauerkraut.[41] Another section is devoted to aubergines and marrows, now popular vegetables in Israel, but at that time, were strange and unknown yet cheap and always available. The book contains a considerable variety of recipes using aubergines but again, cooked in familiar ways. For example, "eggplant liver"[42] is a vegetarian version of the Ashkenazi classic dish of chopped liver.

Along with the recipes, Israeli food products and kitchens are advertised in the book. Almost every two or three pages there is an advertisement promoting the use of a particular brand of oil or a more convenient stove. Of course, all the products are Jewish, and Dr. Meyer uses these brands in her recipes. Although clearly aware of economic difficulties, she always suggests buying Jewish products, even if they are more expensive than the Arab alternative (although it is never stated which alternatives are in fact available). She states that "The Palestinian housewife's duty is to support home industries."[43] The home industries of the time were mainly agricultural ones that focused on the production of fruits and vegetables as

[40] Aubergines and marrows were only exotic for European Jews as Mizrahi Jews had been cooking with those ingredients for centuries. Aubergines for example, are commonly related to Sephardi cooking tradition.
[41] *Ibid.* p.48-61.
[42] *Ibid.* P.112.
[43] *Ibid.* p.32.

well as dairy products like fresh white cheese. It is thus evident that the publication of this cookbook was part of the government campaign *Totzeret Ha Eretz.*

How to Cook in Palestine? was the WIZO's first attempt at systematizing the knowledge their members had acquired in the years they had lived in Palestine. As well as the obvious nationalistic propagandistic goals, the book does not make any open reference to Jewish dietary laws. The book does not have any reference to kosher food, and it even suggests keeping dairy products and meat in the same fridge.[44] This omission probably responds to the Zionist ethos of the time that tried to emphasise the nationalistic aspects of the Hebrew identity as well as its secular character and downplay the religious ones. Neither did it make any effort to recognise the ethnic diversity of the Jewish communities emigrating to Palestine and shows unwillingness to learn traditional Middle Eastern Recipes. The book presents mainly vegetarian recipes, this is not because the author is taking into consideration times of particular scarcity, but rather reflects a trend in most Israeli cookbooks that try to avoid a diasporic diet that was perceived as unhealthy and heavy on meats.[45] This trend would continue in the first decades of statehood, not only because it was seen as the healthier option, but because meat, eggs and other sources of protein were rationed and scarce.

The Tzena: Baking without eggs

The times of scarcity (*Tzena*) and rationed food started during the times of the British Mandate in Palestine and continued for a decade after the establishment of the State of Israel. During those years, several political changes took place in Palestine demonstrating that two different authorities had control over the diet of the Jewish community in Palestine: first the British administration and secondly the Israeli government.

The mass immigration of the previous and first decade of the State of Israel, together with the Second World War and the constant confrontations with the Arab population and their neighbours resulted in the need to control the consumption and distribution of basic goods, including food. In 1949, The Ministry of Supplies and Regulation of Israel introduced a

[44] It is contrary to kosher laws to eat and store dairy products and meat together. This will be explained in chapter 4.

[45] Dafna Hirsch. 2009."We are Here to Bring the West, Not Only to Ourselves: Zionist Occidentalism and the Discourse of Hygiene in Mandate Palestine", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41(4) p.583.

policy of austerity and food rationing.[46] The head of the ministry, Dov Yosef "saw *Tzena* as applying basic egalitarianism, and believed that it was incumbent upon a state to care for the welfare of its citizens and therefore be involved in economic life."[47] The Israeli government conceived Tzena not only as part of a policy aiming to deal with the scarcity of food but one that could help construct an egalitarian society and to integrate immigrants. This was a policy coherent with the ideology of the Labourism that was not only holding office at the time but had created the institutions of the State. This ideology, based on a socialist worldview continued the vision of the pioneers who believed the individual sacrifice of pleasures like good, tasty food was necessary for the well-being of the community.[48] Based on the administrative procedures used by the British administration during the Second World War, the new government, supported by WIZO and Hadassah, implemented campaigns, directed at the housewives.

By 1948, according to Orit Rozin, 50% of the food consumed by Jews living in the Mandate Palestine was produced by Jews while only 7% of the production was Arab. However, 43% was imported including some basic items like flour, sugar, wheat, margarine, meat, and oil.[49] Food choices had little to do with taste and personal preferences, and became a matter of national interest. The authorities gained control over private life and domestic space, and families, but especially women had to adapt their behaviour to fit the national goals, as well as their shopping habits, cupboards, and kitchens. Through everyday routines, the nation was materialized becoming something touchable and even edible, not only an ideal but a way of being that, even when it was closely policed, could be interpreted in many ways.

To persuade women of their role and duties within the nation; the state again used newspaper columns and cookbooks. Officially, they were trying to help housewives, but at the same time, the cookbooks helped to hide the scarcity of the time. The books encouraged women not to use imported products and to leave behind their diasporic diets. For example, the European diet was perceived as labour-intensive and unhealthy while the diet of Mizrahim, especially from communities from Yemen, was label as backwards and insufficient for children.

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[46] Orit Rozin,2015. "Craving Meat during Israel's Austerity Period, 1947-1953, in Anat Helman *Jews and their Foodways,* New York: Oxford University Press [kindle edition]. Location. 2120.
[47] *Ibid.* Location. 2130.
[48] Yael Raviv. *op. cit.*p.41.
[49] Orit Rozin,2015. *op. cit.* Location 2151.

Meat, eggs, sugar, bread, dairy products were some of the food items that were rationed. Meat had the biggest impact on people's emotions and perception of scarcity, but the *Tzena* was not only an ideological move and the effect of the increase in the number of new immigrants but also a consequence of the drop in the import of food and the result of problems in transportation caused by attacks on the road, a decline in domestic production as well as increases in the military consumption of food. [50]

The memory of the *Tzena* is still present not only among those who lived it but also among new generations. For example, Esther, one of my participants who will appear regularly in the next chapters, remembered clearly those times and talked about them with bitterness:

> Those were difficult times. I had just arrived from the United States following my Israeli husband and was trying to establish a home and a family. I hadn't lived in scarcity before, and although my mother had told me about the difficult times in East Europe I had no idea of what it meant to drive for hours to get a tiny chicken or the frustration you feel after making a four-hour line to buy eggs only to find out there are no more until the next week. People were desperate and ate anything. But I was not going to eat pigeons like the rest, I was not going to let my dignity go, so I did buy food on the black market. Yes, of course, I knew it was wrong, the magazines, the radio everybody told us, but I had small children

As Esther's memories show, buying on the black market was strongly discouraged and severely punished, but that did not stop women participating in it, putting their families before the "needs of the nation." Esther's story was not the only one I heard about the black market. It was well-known in my family that when my great grandfather visited his father and brother that lived in Israel in the fifties, he gave them dollars and a fridge, so that they were able to buy food on the black market and preserve it for longer. The story was told to me not only by my family in Mexico but by my relatives in Israel who told it without any shame of having used the black market during the *Tzena*.

These stories contrast with the official narrative of sacrifice for the collective and show us how Israelis constantly negotiated what the nation expected from them, and the behaviour that according to the authorities was supposed to be nationalistic. Women decided to prioritize the wellness of their families and redefined what the nation expected from them.

[50] *Ibid.* Location. 2187.

Melissa L. Caldwell argues in her study about food politics in Moscow that these consumer practices that occur outside of the official economic framework highlight on one hand the state's inability to satisfy the basic needs of the population and on the other, the control the state had over the private daily life of citizens. [51]

The official narrative of the *Tzena* that started during the Second World War took the form of cookbooks, radio shows, and weekly columns with recommendations to the housewives. The aim was to teach women how to keep a healthy diet even with the enormous amount of limitations they were facing. Food choices became a matter of high politics and the British administration appointed a Food Controller who was in charge of imports and rations. Together with WIZO, in 1945 the Food Controller published a brochure entitled *Recipes of the Season*, and with Haddasah the Food Controller produced radio shows like *Eat More Potatoes*.[52]

Newspapers columns and magazines giving recipes and advice on domestic matters were also really popular. After 1940, magazines dedicated to "women´s issues" (housekeeping, children's education, cooking) started appearing, one of the most popular ones was *Olam ha-isha*. These means were used by the British administration to convince women to avoid the black market and cooperate with the war effort.[53] However, the British authorities of the British Mandate did not have any intention of winning the hearts and minds of the Jewish housewives, so WIZO and Hadassah took that responsibility and continued their campaign to change the diet of the diaspora for an Israeli one; at the time, a diet that was characterized by the scarcity of ingredients.

The publication of cookbooks, booklets, newspapers and magazine columns as well as the airing of radio shows devoted to food marked the beginning of a constant preoccupation with the food choices women made. Several decades of war reaffirmed that the nationalistic duty of women lay in the market, the kitchen and at the dinner table.

One of the most popular cookbooks of the time was simply called *The Cookbook* and was written collectively by members of WIZO.[54] The book became so popular that it was re-

[51] Melissa L. Caldwell. 2002. "The Taste of Nationalism: Food Politics in Postsocialist Moscow", *Ethnos.* 67:3 p.299.
[52] Yael Raviv. *op. cit.,* p.139.
[53] Montreal, J. M. O. 2011. Jewish Museum of Montreal. [Online] Available at: http://imjm.ca/location/1613 [Accessed 25 October 2014].
[54] WIZO. 1948. *Sefer haBishul.* 1st ed. Tel Aviv: WIZO.

edited several times. It reflects the political and social situation, the need to cook with the ingredients and portions provided by ration cards, the difficulties in finding meat and the intention of the government to "melt" the cultures of the new immigrants together. It also shows the constant efforts made by the government to promote the use of ration food and to discourage women from buying food in the black market. However, Esther's memories prove that reality was different; housewives were using the black market, contrary to the desires of the government. Although it is evident from their writing that economizing and stretching meat portions appears to be a constant concern, they never directly mention the ration policies.[55] The anonymous authors of this cookbook appeared to be convinced that the austerity situation was temporal and necessary.

Responding to the ideals of the melting pot, especially important during the first years of the state, the cookbook took recipes from different contributors of different ethnic backgrounds. It also recovered some of the recipes that had previously appeared in booklets and columns distributed by WIZO. The short introduction included in the book was written by the WIZO management and it points out that the recipes were tested over a period of 20 years and were adapted to the weather and conditions of Israel.[56]

The book was written for a female audience, and its recipes clearly corresponded to the *Tzena* campaign of the government. Although tacitly, it acknowledged the conditions in which the country was living by including most recipes using dairy products, a whole section on eggs, and one on vegetables to substitute for scarce and expensive meat. In the instructions, WIZO affirms that the decision to include a large vegetarian section separates the books from others published around the world and recommends Israeli housewives should continue buying local products and to substitute meat proteins in their diet for the cheaper and easier to find eggs.[57]

Although the books started introducing Middle Eastern recipes, with the 1960 edition even having a complete section on Middle Eastern food, the European roots of the recipes are still rather evident. There is a whole section on potatoes, recipes using barley (a European staple food), but rice (a very popular staple food item in the Middle East) is almost

[55] WIZO. 1948. *Loc cit.*
[56] WIZO. 1948. *Ibid.* p.4.
[57] WIZO. 1948. *Ibid.* p.9-46.

unmentioned.[58] However, it is possible that the reason that the book lacked recipes using rice was that during the time of its publication, the grain was scarce in Israel.

An important section in the book is the one devoted to fish. It is a rather long section and includes a lot of pickled herrings, a popular dish among the Jewish communities of Poland and Russia.[59] The inclination to adapt European recipes to local ingredients instead of embracing new local recipes seems to be a common tendency among the cookbooks of the time. The preference for European recipes made more difficult for Mizrahi women to adapt to the *Tzena* policies than for Ashkenazim as not only did the cookbooks devoted much more space to Ashkenazi recipes, the food products subsidised also made it easier to continue with this diet.

But not only WIZO published *Tzena* cookbooks. In 1949, Lilian Cornfeld now known as the "First Lady of Israeli cuisine", published another cookbook to help women cope with the austerity policies. The book titled *Ma Ava she mi-Manor ha Tzena? Madrikh*[60] (What shall I cook from the *Tzena* rations? A guide) was not the first cookbook of the author, who in 1942 had already published another compilation of recipes devoted to cooking in times of scarcity.[61] Lillian Cornfeld was a Canadian Jewish woman, married to an Israeli that spent more than 40 years of her life living in Israel. She studied Nutrition at Columbia Teachers College and worked in WIZO as supervisor of Domestic Science. Not only did she work for WIZO, between 1941 and 1942 she also managed all the food units of the U.S. Army in Tel Aviv and the food services of the American Red Cross in Tel Aviv from 1942 to 1944. She then went on to be Chief Dietician for the UNNRA Refugee Camps in Palestine in 1945-1946 and then in Egypt.[62] She wrote food columns for the newspaper *Jerusalem Post* and other Israeli newspapers and started broadcasting programs about food in 1938. Her cookbooks are considered by many as the first Hebrew Cuisine cookbooks and she also dedicated her time to writing special diet books and giving nutritional advice.[63] *How to cook with the Tzena Rations* showed women how to stretch the ingredients available, how to substitute meat for vegetables and how to bake with almost no eggs.[64] In her book, Cornfeld suggested following

[58] *Ibid.* p.116-125.
[59] *Ibid.* p.47-64.
[60] Lilian Cornfeld. 1949. *Ma Avashel mi-Manot ha Tzena? Madrikh.* Tel Aviv: Published by the author.
[61] Lilian Cornfeld. 1942. *Keitzad Mevashalim BiyemiMilhama?* Tel-Aviv: Olam ha-isha.
[62] Giveon Cornfeld. 1996. Lilian. Honolulu Orion Master Recordings.
[63] *Loc. cit*.
[64] Cornfeld. 1949. *Loc. cit.*

a mainly vegetarian diet where proteins were obtained from powder eggs, milk and other dairy products. The cover of the book shows women from different ethnic backgrounds in military positions highlighting cooking as a nationalist duty but also the diversity of ethnicities in Israel. The book continues to have a melting pot approach. However, her recipes follow the trend of privileging Ashkenazi recipes cooked with local ingredients. She does mention kosher practices but she does not highlight them for their religious significance but for their hygienic benefits, especially in warm weather, much like Israel's climate. This is an interesting way in which the author secularized traditional religious values and instead of asking the readers to change them she simply suggested a new approach to them, one that was in accordance with the secular aspirations of the founders of the state. She explains how to make meat kosher as well as the benefits of separating meat from dairy. She prizes its historical and sanitary aspects and recommends it to "primitive countries." This is a constant in all her cookbooks especially in *Israeli Cookery* published in 1962 when the *tzena* times were over.[65]

Another characteristic of her writing is her defence of Arab food, or as she calls it "the local diet." In her cookbooks, she constantly mentions the benefits of the dishes prepared by the "locals" although she never mentions Palestine by name.[66]

The *Tzena* campaign was successful during 1949 and some months of 1950. However, in the second half of 1950 and in 1951 the black market became more active, and the government introduced new policies, including the inspections of private cupboards and freezers.[67]

During the fifties, the majority of the Jewish population of Iraq migrated to Israel. From a middle-class origin, most immigrants were sent to a transit camp where their food choices were obliterated and their diet labelled as unhealthy.[68] That was one of the reasons for the failure of *Tzena*; it didn´t take all into account the different diets of the immigrants and the need for some ingredients (oil instead of butter for example) on the ration cards. The ration cards privileged the European diet by subsidizing European ingredients like bread but omitting pita bread.[69] As the cookbooks of the time revealed, these omissions were made as

[65] Lilian Cornfeld. 1962. *Israeli cookery.* Tel Aviv: Private edition.
[66] *Loc. cit.*
[67] Rozin 2006, *op. cit.* p.58.
[68] Esther Meir-Glitzenstein.2015. "Longing for the Aromas of Baghdad: Food, Emigration, and Transformation in the Lives of Iraqi Jews in Israel in the 1950s", Anat Helman *Jews and their Foodways,* New York: Oxford University Press [kindle edition]. Location 3313.
[69] Raviv. *op. cit,* p.65.

part of the absorption policy, as it was thought that the immigrants from Muslim countries, especially from Yemen had poor and backwards diets.[70] Again, in the case of Iraqi Jews, fundamental ingredients for their diets like rice, pitta bread, and lamb were not included in the subsidized ingredients, resulting in women exchanging large quantities of white bread for pita and using the black market whenever it was possible for them.[71]

In theory, the cookbooks should have helped women cook with unknown ingredients such as olive oil, courgettes, tomatoes, and aubergines but it is well documented that some of them still bought traditional ingredients from the black market.[72] Apparently, the tools used by the government, the cookbooks and nationalistic campaigns were not enough to convince the Israeli housewives to put the nation first and then their children. As the government was not able to fulfil the nutritional needs of children, or at least women perceived it like that; they resisted the new politics not only by buying food on the black market but by sacrificing their rations in order to give it to their children. Those years saw an increase in women's mortality in Israel.[73]

The Israeli women of the *Tzena* constantly broke the rules imposed on them, and therefore they were seen as the cause of the increase of activity on the black market and in contrast, men became a symbol of morality as it was thought they did not have any responsibility in the household. Nonetheless, men ate everyday dishes prepared with black market ingredients without complaining and is possible to imagine then, blind to the problems of the household, that they sometimes encouraged women to buy the ingredients.

Times of Milk and Honey

The decade of the sixties started with better prospects for Israeli households. It seemed that the war was over and that the times of austerity were in the past. Little by little food control disappeared and meat, sugar, flour and rice became more common at the dinner table of Israelis. Nonetheless, the Zionist aim of creating a new society with a new man had not completely disappeared. The melting pot ideology was still alive, and the aim of social and political changes, the divisions between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim and the attitude towards

[70] Lilian Cornfeld. 1962. *op. cit.* p.1.
[71] Esther Meir-Glitzenstein. *op. cit.* Location 3418.
[72] See Raviv. *op. cit,* p.64-74.
[73] Rozin.2006. *op. cit*. p.64.

religion are also reflected in the recipe books. In the cookbooks of this time, religious elements appeared more frequently, recipes were kosher, and authors explained how to run a kosher kitchen.

Lilian Cornfeld's extremely popular book, *Israeli Cookery*[74] embodied the trends and the social situation of Israel during the sixties. *Israeli Cookery* is a completely different cookbook from the ones that have been analysed up to this point, for the first time, scarcity is not the main factor to take into account when choosing ingredients and cooking. Through this book, Lilian Cornfeld writing for a foreign and possibly Jewish female audience, thinking of emigrating to Israel, explains in detail the new Israeli diet and the characteristics she considers are fundamental of this food culture.[75] Without question, this might be the most popular book by Lilian Cornfeld, and it was constantly mentioned by my participants. However, although it seems that the intention of the author was to show the uniqueness of Israeli cuisine, Esther, for example, said to me that she liked Cornfeld's books because her recipes were "really American." On more than one occasion, Esther told me that she had learned to cook from cookbooks and newspaper articles as she did not like the way her mother cooked. She learned from those cookbooks typical Ashkenazi recipes that she now cooks for Shabbat and holidays; some recipes now labelled as traditionally Israeli like chicken schnitzel and Israeli salad (chopped vegetable salad). She preferred cookbooks written in English as her Hebrew was not that good at the time, but she also looked for familiar recipes using turkey, pancakes, "kosher hot dogs," pasta. Lilian Cornfeld's cookbooks were used by Esther constantly as although she cooked with local ingredients; she gave her recipes, according to Esther an American approach, that was easy to follow and to understand.

Lilian Cornfeld's use of local ingredients did not meant a complete disengagement from Western food. Cornfeld claimed that 'Sabra' (Israeli) cooking is not entirely Middle Eastern, nor is it European Jewish.[76] It is clear from Cornfeld's writing that she believed that Israel had built a distinctive national cuisine and that her duty was to promote this diet not only among Israeli women but among future immigrants and foreigners. Although she acknowledged the existence of different culinary traditions in Israel, she does point out that

[74] Lilian Cornfeld. 1962. *Israeli cookery.* Tel Aviv: Private edition.
[75] *Loc. cit.*
[76] Lilian Cornfeld.1962. p.91.

she considers some of them, such as the Yemenite diet, to be unhealthy.[77] Cornfeld never judges the recipes according to their taste, but according to what she considers are their health benefits.

Nevertheless, she does write about the difference in taste and food preferences of different Jewish communities: "If one wants to please all factions of the Israeli population in a common dining room, there are two major differences in catering: rice and oil for Orientals and potatoes and margarine for Europeans. All communities have less appreciation for anything other than fresh foods: thus, canned and frozen foods do not sell well except to Westerns". [78] The quotation reveals a willingness to accept the difference between communities and a new acceptance of diversity. That said, this does not mean a renunciation of the aims of creating a cohesive cuisine and country. She openly states that there is an "urgent need to create Israeli cuisine[79]" and despite this difference, the author finds common ground) between all Israelis, like, for example, a preference for fresh food over processed or preserved products, she also uses this common ground to start defining the other: the Middle Eastern.

Another innovation of Cornfeld's books is the inclusion of a 'Historical Forword' where the Jewish history of persecution is highlighted, as well as the times of the Ottoman Empire. Palestine before 1880 is described as "a disease-ridden land, arid and misgoverned, without natural resources and peopled by a sparse Arab population of some 300,000. But it was home and the land of the dreams".[80] Lillian Cornfeld gave a political tone to the book by pointing out the hardships of the new life in the state and by subscribing to the Zionist claims that before their arrival, Israel was an uncivilized and unpopulated land.

As mentioned previously, Lilian Cornfeld does emphasise the "ethnic diversity" of Israel, but she does not spare her judgement over the culinary traditions she mentions. She emphasises the backwardness of the Oriental Jewish communities especially the Yemenite community: "Yemenite food is not very cultivated. Most Yemenites never saw sugar or flour and use food in its natural form. They are meat eaters who eat every part of the animal, including inner organs, whether beef or lamb".[81] In contrast, Cornfeld does not consider the

[77] *Ibid.* p.2.
[78] *Ibid.* p.IX.
[79] *Loc. cit.*
[80] *Ibid.* p.XIV.
[81] *Ibid.*p.1.

Iraqi Jewish community to be as poor as the other Oriental communities and qualifies it at a high cultural level.[82] She also differentiates between Sephardic Jews and Oriental Jews, recognising Sephardic Jews as being the oldest community living in Israel. For that reason, instead of including a section on Sephardic food, she attributes the food eaten traditionally in Jerusalem to this community.[83] The backwardness of Yemenites and "Oriental Jews," seems to be the way in which she justifies the prevalence of European recipes and although the author highlights the originality of the Israeli diet she continues to rely on Ashkenazi traditions.

Conclusion

Israel is a country shaped by hundreds of Jewish communities that arrived from the diaspora carrying with them different experiences and historical trajectories. The Zionist elites tried to unify these experiences and construct a new identity that left those differences in the past and concentrated in the national future of the New Hebrew. Food was used as part of a series of policies that had the aim of building a uniform understanding of the nation, of what it meant to be Israeli. Therefore, during the previous decades and the first years after the establishment the State of Israel, cookbooks became a didactical tool, instructional manuals that had the aim of creating a new food culture that helped newcomers to adapt to their new country. They explained to immigrants where to shop and which products to buy, how and when to eat them, their origins and the reason why some dishes were better than others. But is seems that culinary identities cannot be imposed from the top down. On the contrary, what this chapter showed was that any governmental imposition, even those related to war conditions, had to be negotiated and was reinterpreted by those who were affected by them. In this case, women continually negotiated those dietary impositions, policies and suggestions made by the authorities and found in cooking a way to express their own understanding of the nation.

In the case of Israel, the formation of a national cuisine became part of attempts to create a national collective identity, that was supposed to be different from the Jewish identity of the diaspora and emphasised the connection between the Jewish immigrants and

[82] *Ibid.*p.6.
[83] *Ibid.*p.25.

their Old-New Homeland. This identity had to also absorb and melt together the traditions, histories, and customs of the different Jewish communities arriving and transform them into a single nation. The *Tzena* period, discursively a socialist policy to create an equal society and to integrate all the immigrants; not only favoured the European diet by subsidizing Ashkenazi staple food items but also provoked emotional distress in the population by imposing a stoic diet that made the ideal, strong Hebrew men more difficult to attain. Food choices quickly became a national concern. Where to shop, what to eat and how to cook were seen as female responsibilities of national importance. During times of scarcity this decision became even more important and the everyday life of families, their tables and kitchens became a space under governmental control and supervision. Women negotiated and resisted the limits and guidelines given to them by the authorities and used all of the resources available to them to feed their families according to what they thought was best for them, although it was not necessarily best for the nation.

Jewish European immigrants rapidly became the elite of the country and saw themselves as a civilizing and modernizing force. They perceived the Middle Eastern Jewish immigrants as backwards and their food traditions as unhealthy. The melting pot, therefore, was not a blend of traditions in equal terms but a Euroization of Mizrahim, local traditions and ingredients. Local dishes were appropriated by the newcomers, ingredients substituted when necessary and those dishes that were adopted by Israelis in general later became appropriated and nationalized.

It is clear then that the melting pot was not a peaceful process in which a new culinary and national identity was quietly adopted by the population. As I will explain in later chapters, it was a violent process by which the authorities privileged the dominant European culture and appropriated local dishes. As Appadurai affirms, "Especially in the culinary matter, the melting pot is a myth."[84]

[84] Appadurai. opc.it. p. 22.

Chapter 3. Food in context: between rural and urban life.

Israel is not a country where you can easily travel without a car. Although most cities are connected by train and bus, smaller towns aren't and it can be complicated to visit them without a private car. During Shabbat, there is no public transport in cities, except for Haifa, so you need to think carefully about where you end up on a Friday evening. All those characteristics made my fieldwork, especially during weekends, a little bit more complicated. I did not have the freedom I wanted to move around the country, and I was unable to visit all of my participants in their own houses.

Such was the case with Hava, mentioned in the previous chapter. I was unable to visit her in her house, as she lived in a farm far away from public transport. However, we found ways to meet as she was always lively and willing to share with me her family memories as well as the details of her rural life, even when some of her stories were full of sorrow. She talked a lot about her childhood in the kibbutz, about the food she ate growing up there in the sixties and about how the communal life they had affected their family. Her descriptions of life in the kibbutz matched the stories of most of my informants that also grew up or lived in a kibbutz. Hava's stories of life in the kibbutz where full of food memories, especially of those meals eaten in the communal dining hall: "Nobody paid any attention to what we were eating, we just ate to survive. Every week we had the same food, I hated the meatballs. We had them twice a week. On Monday the meatballs were fried, and then on Thursday they served meatballs again but disguised with tomato sauce. The meatballs had more flour than meat. I really didn't like them. We also always had the "Israeli salad," they put a plate on the table with seasonal vegetable, olive oil, and lemons, and we cut them and peeled it and prepared our own dish. I think they used to call it Ben-Gurion salad because he liked to eat vegetables in this way. I was a really thin girl, not like now, and they spoiled me a lot. Not my parents, as at the time we did not live with our parents, we lived in the children's house. But the woman that took care of me she always had something special for me to eat, I was a really fussy eater, so she needed to find a way of making me have something".

Hava's memories of food in the kibbutz highlights a fundamental part of life in Israel during the sixties: the kibbutz and the socialist ethos that surrounded it. During the first decades of the State of Israel, the time when Hava grew up, the rural life of the kibbutz was a fundamental aspect of Israeli society, and it contrasted with the urban life of cities like Tel

Aviv. However, as time went by, political changes, war, and globalization changed Israeli society and almost caused the disappearance of the rural collective lifestyle of the kibbutzim and the rise of cosmopolitan urban life embodied in Tel Aviv.

In this chapter, I will analyse the changes in the food trends between the 60s and the 90s in Israel, giving special attention to the differences between the food culture of the kibbutz and the city, specifically of Tel Aviv. The analysis of the changes and continuities of food trends during these decades allows us to understand better the process of the national formation of Israel as well as the political, social and ideological changes of the time.[1] Food culture will reveal how those "macro-changes" affected the everyday life of ordinary people and how they accepted or not those changes depending on their circumstances and their own ideological and political stances. These changes also highlight the interaction between elites and non-elites in the construction of national identity.

Tim Edensor affirms that the nation is sustained and shaped by the norms and framework that it imposes on everyday life.[2] This is particularly clear in the case of the kibbutz; political changes and the state ideology became fundamental agents in the mundane life of people, and those changes deeply affected their lives, family structures and even the way they ate. I will argue that the local, stoic, socialist life of the kibbutz contrasted with the cosmopolitanism of the city and that these differences were noticeable in the foodways of both places. However, the culinary traditions that developed in rural and urban Israel are still a fundamental part of the contemporary culinary culture of the country. Through the analysis of the food culture of the kibbutz, the role of women in the national project will become prominent. As I will analyse in this chapter for those women that lived a collective life, baking was not seen as a gendered oppressive obligation; on the contrary, it became a fundamental tool to express agency and individuality.

In the case of urban life, I will contend that as the scarcity and the food restraint it implied disappeared and the socialist era saw its end Israelis developed an appetite for foreign and new flavours that were seen as part of a "normalization" of everyday life. Israelis were willing to experiment with new tastes, especially Asian, and to organize parties "Western style". The need to "choose the nation" highlighted in the previous socialist ideology through

[1] Yael Raviv. 2015. *Falafel Nation,* Lincoln-London: University of Nebraska Press, p.3.
[2] Tim Edensor. 2002. *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life,* Berg: New York-Oxford. p.91.

every bite lost its importance, and the middle classes were free to taste those new dishes without any "national guilt." Simultaneously the authority's melting pot ideal of the previous decades was slowly substituted for an image of multiculturalism that became especially useful to promote the image of Israel abroad. I will sustain, following Atsuko Ichijo and Ronald Ranta, that food not only flags the nation domestically but is also used to promote certain images of the nation to the exterior.[3] Nonetheless, although urban middle-class Israelis became open to trying new tastes and thirsty for distant and exotic flavours, and the government was keen to give the country an image of tolerance and openness, the flavours of the different diasporic communities were still present, were not blended and the idea that Jewish European culture was superior to Mizrahi culture continued. It was not until recently that the diversity of the Jewish communities and the influence of Arab cuisine—always unrooted from its Palestinian origins—became part of this image of cosmopolitanism with which Israel promoted their national identity.

The change in discourse

The sixties were a decade of change in Israel. After the Six-Day War, Israel stopped being perceived by the international community as a victim of war and conflict and was instead seen by some as a colonialist power in the region.[4] The cultural and ideological divisions within Israel became more problematic and visible as well, and the ethnic differences between its inhabitants became deeper. At the beginning of the decade, when the socialist ideals of the Labour Party were still predominant, food choices were limited and the idea of eating for survival and not for pleasure was part of the official discourse.[5] Nonetheless things changed during the seventies, the European socialist establishment—that had been the dominant political force through all the first half of the twentieth century—lost its power as the right wing party took control over the country's institutions. Standards of living improved, the Israeli market opened and the collectivist and socialist ideology started to dilute.[6]

[3]Atsuko Ichijo and Ronal Ranta. 2016. *Food, National Identity and Nationalism,* Basingstoke-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.107.
[4] Colin Shindler. 2008. *A History of Modern Israel.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.125.
[5] Iris Kalka. 1991. "Coffee in Israeli Suburbs", *Leisure Studies,* 10(2), p.120.
[6] Colin Schindler, *op. cit.* pp.123-143.

The improvement in living conditions was a consequence of a slower rhythm of immigration and a rapid economic growth.[7] As an outcome of the Six-Day war, Israel expanded its territory by three times and took control over the entirety of Jerusalem. It also occupied Golan Heights, the Sinai, and the West Bank.[8] As a consequence of the controversy surrounding this new situation, another war in 1973 and a series of scandals; Labourism lost much of its power. The decline of the socialist worldview of the pioneers was palpable in the political rise of the right, and the social and political fragmentation of Israeli society became more noticeable. Nonetheless, fundamental institutions like the kibbutz survived these changes at least for some time, and the contrast between the life of the city and the life of the kibbutz left a deep mark on Israeli society.

These changes were visible in the way Israelis thought about food. Although the scarcity of the first decades did not disappear completely, the ideological shifts that characterized the seventies led Israelis to see food through different lenses. From cooking as a nationalistic duty policed by political as well as health authorities; food became a source of pleasure and entertainment, a way of tasting the cuisine of unknown and faraway places and of normalizing life. It also served to display the origins of a family, to recover memories of lost members of the family and to maintain traditions acquired in the diaspora. Zionist leaders were less concerned with proving their connection to the land and with giving the image of a unified country, giving ordinary people more freedom to choose less nationalistic options not only in the privacy of their kitchens but in the public sphere.[9] Food also became a contentious space between seculars and religious people in Israel, as even during the first years of the State, the debate about kosher laws in the public sphere was constant. Food choices were a way of pointing out the ethnic, class and religious differences of the Jewish population. Until the eighties, Mizrahim had to cook their food only at home, due to the European aspirations of the melting pot and the perception that their food culture was unhealthy and less civilized. It was not until that decade that they were able to proudly flag their origins.[10] They no longer had to eat European rationed food to be a "real Israeli"; they could go back to their roots or decide to eat only new flavours and would still be considered part of the nation.

[7] Yael Raviv. 2015. *Falafel Nation.* Lincoln-London: University of Nebraska Press. pp.119-156.
[8] Colin Schindler. *op. cit.* p.134.
[9] Zeynep Sertbulut. 2012. "The Culinary State: On Politics of Representation and Identity in Israel", *HAGAR,* 10(2), p.50.
[10] *Ibid.* p.65.

The government saw this eagerness to taste new experiences as an opportunity to market the country as a multicultural and diverse one. Especially during the peak of the Oslo Peace process at the beginning of the decade of the nineties, Israeli authorities felt the need to promote a good image of the country, an image of tolerance and multiethnicity.[11] Food became a tool of soft power, and Israel started to use techniques of what is known as "gastrodiplomacy." [12] The cookbooks published in Israel during those times reflect this tendency of using food as a key instrument not only for the development of a tourism industry but as a tool to improve the image of Israel in the world. The official food discourse after the seventies reveals a change in the priorities of the Israeli government. The triumphant Israel of the aftermath of the Six-Day war needed to show to the world they were a multicultural, tolerant but Western society and an enclave of "civilization" in the Middle East. But cookbooks also show the social changes of the time, as nostalgic cookbooks appeared as well as others instructing Israelis in how to entertain in their homes.

But food not only showed ethnic or religious differences, it also showed the different ways of life prevalent within Israeli society. The kibbutz, a fundamental institution of Israel was still alive, and its population was not enjoying this new taste of the outside that their urban counterparts were. Kibbutzniks were eating the fruit of their labour and continued eating in collective dinners where the choices of Tel Avivians were not available to them. At least not in their everyday life.

The kibbutz during the sixties and seventies

As mentioned above, the sixties and seventies were times of change in Israel. Slowly, Israeli society left the values of the Zionist European pioneers of commonality, the sacrifice of the individual and stoicism in the past and embraced the consumerist life of the West. Nonetheless, part of the population was still convinced of and committed to the ideology of the founders of the State and their way of life.

In the first decade after the establishment of the State of Israel, the kibbutz represented the socialist ideological triumph of the labour movement. The kibbutz was part of the collective way of production ambitioned by the founders of the state and its collective way of life was

[11] *Ibid.* p. 66.
[12] Atsuko Ichijo and Ronal Ranta. *Op. cit.* p.107.

seen as a fundamental part of the identity of the country.[13] It was also seen as a "secular incarnation of the religious belief that the Jews were a chosen people […] the kibbutz was a real contribution to the creation of a better world, alongside an explicit national commitment to equality, the purity of arms and other values."[14] However, women in the kibbutz were never equals in the construction of the nation and they did not enter agricultural production in the same way that men did and were relegated to the kitchen and domestic work.[15]

During the sixties and seventies, the kibbutz was still a fundamental social organization in Israel. It represented Israeliness in the way that its founders had shaped it: the hard-working strong Hebrew man, tanned by working the fields, proud of taking care of his land, exactly the opposite of the stereotype of the weak man that lived in a European ghetto and was not capable of defending himself. The kibbutz movement was founded by the second wave of Jewish pioneers from East Europe that arrived between 1904 and 1914.[16] The kibbutz was established as a "social organization where members live, work, and spend their free time and where an overarching ideology arranges most aspects of public and private life".[17] The ideology of the kibbutz was radical collectivism that "focused, among other things, on the negation of personal property and space. The property was jointly held, and income from work went to a common fund. From this fund, members received a budget based on their personal needs, regardless of their contribution to the common income".[18] Although kibbutz members did not constitute the majority of the population of Israel they were seen by many as "the spearhead of Zionism and the jewel in Israel's crown".[19] This worldview not only affected the personal finances of the members of the kibbutz but also their family life. As part of a collective way of life, children did not share their parents' house and lived in the children's house. They only spend a few hours a day with their parents and part of that time was spent in the dining hall, not in the family house.[20]

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[13] Tom Segev. 2002. *Elvis in Jerusalem: Post Zionism and the Americanization of Israel*. *op. cit.* p.62
[14] *Loc. cit.*
[15] Sylvie Fogiel-Bijaoui. 1992. "From Revolution to Motherhood: The Case of Women in the Kibbutz, 1910-1948." in Deborah S. Bernstein, *Pioneers and Homemakers. Jewish Women in Pre-state Israel*. New York:State University of New York Press. p.214.
[16] Liora Gvion. 2015. "The Changing Significance of Cooking and Meals for Kibbutz Women", *Food and Foodways*, 23(3), p.166.
[17] Nir Avieli, 2018. *Op. cit.* p.118.
[18] Liora Gvion, 2015. *Loc. cit.*
[19] Nir Avieli, 2018. *Op. cit.* p.112.
[20] *Ibid.* p.167.

By the sixties and seventies, changes started to happen, as women that had grown up in children's houses realized they did not want to bring up their children that way. Political changes also affected the kibbutz of the seventies and eighties as the triumph of the right wing deeply affected them. The kibbutz was seen as the stronghold of the labour movement and therefore as a danger for the newly elected right wing. Their resources and subsidies were cut, initiating the privatization of the kibbutz.[21]

Nowadays the kibbutz has lost much of its influence on the daily life of Israel, but the rural way of life is still a reality in the memories of adults in Israel. They are still seen as a symbol of the dreams of the first decades, and people around the world volunteer every year to work on the few that survive. The role of this Israeli institution was not only fundamental to the economic development of the country thanks to its agricultural contribution, but also for the construction of the Israeli national identity. Even for people that did not live in a kibbutz, the institution represents even now a key feature of their collective identity, and it is usually talked about with nostalgia and respect. However, people that did live in them or visited family often remember the negative aspects of a collective lifestyle. Many of those memories are related to food and feeding and talking about kibbutz food is a way of expressing how this lifestyle affected the relationships its members had with their families, especially with their mothers.

The collective dining hall was the centre of the collective life of the kibbutz. Its importance for the socialist project was fundamental and they were established as "hubs of commensality and food sharing"[22] in the same way that the communal kitchens were for the Soviet Union.[23] According to Melissa L. Caldwell, the transfer of food preparation to the public sphere in the Soviet Union had the purpose of promoting communist values like egalitarianism and collective responsibility.[24] In both cases, the private kitchen, and in the case of the Israeli kibbutz, baking, became a safe space for families, away from the surveillance of the authorities.

Chen, for example, a renowned food writer in Israel, had a difficult time talking to me about her childhood in the kibbutz. As well as many of my participants, she did not remember

[21] Michal Palgi. 2002. "Organization Change and Ideology: The Case of the Kibbutz", *International Review of Sociology,*12(3) p.389.
[22] Nir Avieli, 2018. *op. cit.* p.117.
[23] Melissa. L. Caldwell, 2002. Op. cit. p.300.
[24] *Loc. cit.*

those days as happy ones. She was only able to talk about the food in the kibbutz when she had a plate of Greek olives and aubergines in front of her as if they guaranteed that she would never again have to eat the things she did when she was a child. “We ate to survive in the kibbutz, we had to finish everything, and the food was always the same: Schnitzels on Sunday, stuffed peppers on Monday, fish on Wednesdays and on Thursday a pie using the leftovers of the week. On Friday, it was a “sit down table” and we had chicken soup, rice, Russian salad, a Jewish European dinner, let’s say”.

In the same way as Hava, Chen was haunted by the memories of her childhood in the kibbutz. Their experience with food was similar, and they both highlighted the monotony of the dishes and the lack of “excitement” in them. “Food in the kibbutz was never about pleasure or about enjoying ourselves. It was about fuel, we needed fuel to work the land, and we were only allowed to cook with the ingredient we grew or that were cheap and Jewish” said Chen. The monotony of eating the same things every week, the disregard for their taste and the need to make the best of the food they grew and never leave anything were common topics among my participants.

On the other hand, private baking was also a common theme, clearly related to family memories, especially to their mothers. In their memories, baking represented an escape not only from the monotony of the kibbutz diet but especially a way to establish a connection with their mothers from whom they were apart most of the time. Neither Chen or Hava talked about the flavours of the cookies or cakes their mothers used to bake; they just remembered that they were a special treat and even the women that disliked cooking for the communal dinner enjoyed baking. Baking became the only way in which women could feed their children and establish connections with them. Because the dinner hall provided them with their main meals, treats in the form of baked goods were the only way through which women were able to satisfy their need to feed their families. But even in this case as it was explained to me, women had to join a waiting list and wait their turn to use the collective oven.

Cookies were a cherished memory for Hava and especially important for her as she grew up in the “children’s house” of a kibbutz, and only saw her parents a couple of hours each afternoon. With sadness and sorrow, she told me how her 22-year-old mother escaped at night to see her son in the children’s house, “it is only now that I have my own children that I understand the cruelty of taking away the baby of a 22-year-old woman. She escaped at night and saw my brother from the window; she just wanted to make sure he was ok. One

day she was discovered. They had a general meeting to discuss the problem and punished her. It was supposed to be liberating, not taking care of your children, but it was really cruel. The only way she was able to take care of us was by baking. My parents had a small closet on their porch, where my mother left the cookies she baked during the week. She had to wait for her turn to use the communal oven. It was incredible to see all these "liberated" women making a line to bake cakes and cookies. I remember going every morning, to my parents' flat, without anybody seeing me and stealing one of the cookies. Of course, my mother knew we were going to take them; she left them there for us." Cooking, more than agricultural tasks, became a way to express the women's desire to have a family life of their own, and to show their unwillingness to put the nation's needs before their family's needs. In the same way that previous generations of Israeli women had rebelled from their national duties by buying food for their children on the black market, the second generation of women of the kibbutz was not willing to let their family life be ruled by the authorities. Baking allowed them to gain agency and also to give some to their children by establishing their own individual taste.[25]

Hava laughed while she was remembering the image of the women making lines to bake cakes for their families. She explained it by saying that, at least for her, women's equality did not have anything to do with keeping women apart from their families, "we were still given jobs in the kitchen and the laundry, that were not as appreciated as the ones men had, and on top of that we were deprived of the company of our parents or children." Hava's mother, as well as other women of the kibbutz, found in traditional female tasks such as baking a way of rebelling from the way they were told to behave: as women that put the collective good before their family's needs and as committed members of the kibbutz that carry on with their work without the interference of domestic duties. Although Hava did say she thought women in the kibbutz had an easier time than women in the city, she still complained of this supposed equality that they were supposed to achieve by taking the private sphere to the public one and she pointed out that it was through taking care of their families by baking that her mother felt happier.

Hava was not the only one of my participants that remembered baking as a fundamental part of the kibbutz life and especially of her relationship with her mother. When talking about baking; Chen also recalled her mother, "I remember the smell of cookies and

[25] *Ibid*.p.175.

cakes that came from the kitchen each afternoon. The women of the kibbutz took turns baking, they hated cooking, but they loved baking. Except one: my mother. My mother was a beautiful woman who left the kibbutz and my father when I was really young. She then went to Italy; she fell in love with an Italian and left. I was stuck with the bad food of the kibbutz and only enjoyed food when I was spending holidays with my grandmother or my aunt. I remember the rest of the children eating the baked goods made by their mothers. I didn't have that; I didn't have a mother with me, so I didn't have cookies unless somebody took pity on me".

Both Chen and Hava remembered the unwillingness kibbutz women had for cooking for the dining hall. In the same way as in other socialist projects, cooking was perceived as a female task that prevents gender equality. The collective preparation of food in the public realm was supposed to liberate women from domestic oppression but the work in the dining hall kitchen was not given the same value that working in the fields and women were not given the choice of cooking or not for their families. Baking became a way of taking care of their children, especially when they lived in the children's house. They related baking to motherhood, to feeling closer to their families and less embedded in the collective ideal of the kibbutz life. It seemed that baking became a rebellious act in the kibbutz, a "redemptive moment"[26] through which women rebelled from the behaviour that was expected of the "New Hebrew women" without breaking the social convention of kibbutz life or the routines. However, Chen's mother decided to leave the kibbutz and her family for an Italian man, in fact a priest, breaking with everything that was expected of her.

Although Chen and Hava remembered the food of the collective dinners as monotonous and relate it to feelings of abandonment, they do not have strong memories of living in scarcity in the kibbutz as some other participants that grew up in urban contexts have from the same time. As kibbutzim produced at least a part of their food and had a frugal way of life, the scarcity of the *Tzena* did not considerably change their diets. However, Hava and Chen both remember that after the fifties, as teenagers leaving the kibbutz for the army or for holidays, they were impressed by the luxury and the variety of food available in the cities, especially in Tel Aviv, and this increased their determination of moving to different urban spaces.

[26] See Michael E. Gardiner. 2000. Critique of Everyday life, London-New York: Routledge.

Kibbutz and the institutional diet

Hava and Chen not only did not have any memories about scarcity in the kibbutz, but they also did not recall any mention of kosher laws in the kibbutz. However, they did relate kibbutz food with Ashkenazi food by pointing out that the "institutional food" of the seventies was Ashkenazi, the "public food" in Israel. Josef, a food journalist, and Rahel, a food historian, agreed that the bad reputation of Ashkenazi food in Israel was related to its institutionalization in the seventies that was based on the kibbutz diet. After decades of trying to standardize and homogenize the Israeli diet, most institutions like the army, hospitals and the kibbutz had adopted the majority of European dishes (chicken soup, roasted potatoes, chopped liver, boiled chicken, schnitzels, white bread—especially challah—pasta, boiled eggs) and substituted ingredients difficult to find with local ones like yellow cheeses for white cheeses, or adopted new ones like marrows, aubergines and tomatoes. They had also adopted some local dishes like hummus and falafel, but they de-Arabized them and gave them a Jewish or "biblical"[27] origin. As Rahel pointed out to me, the women in charge of the food of the kibbutz and other institutions had been trained by WIZO and Hadassah and had a deep understanding of nutrition and healthy eating. However, their work was not seen as valuable as the work in the fields. Yet, Rahel sustained that the knowledge they had was fundamental for them in developing a healthy diet, a diet that although described as monotonous by Chen and Hava was, according to Rahel, healthier than in most of the countries at the time. She maintained that apart from Mexico and Italy, in the seventies, no other country but Israel ate fresh salads and vegetables.

Nonetheless, she did acknowledge there was a disregard for the flavours and taste of food. Middle Eastern food in the kibbutz, except for falafel that was given a Jewish Yemenite origin and was seen as quick, easy food, was avoided as WIZO instructors perceived it as unhealthy, unpractical and labour-intensive.

The diet of the kibbutz, as mentioned before, was then the model for institutional food in Israel. Lilian Cornfeld, as mentioned in the previous chapter, included a chapter on

[27] Biblical is the term used to label local food, for example hummus, without attributing it to a Palestinian origin but giving it a Jewish one that sustains that these foods were consumed during the times of the ancient Kingdom of Israel.

institutional food in her cookbook *Israeli Cookery*. [28] Cornfeld highlighted the use of ingredients grown in Israel like grapes and oranges and their quality as well as the use of ingredients native to Israel like cumin, pine nuts, sesame oil and red pepper. She emphasised the use of vegetables in the kibbutz, praising the diet of the kibbutznik, its simplicity, and nutritional value. Nonetheless, her recipes in other sections of the book, as mentioned in the previous chapter, privilege the use of "European" ingredients like potatoes and give second place to the local ingredients like tomatoes, aubergines, and oranges. This could be taken as another difference between the diets of the cities and the kibbutz. While the kibbutz women were directly trained by WIZO instructors and then had little choice in what to cook for the communal dinner, women cooking in private settings for their families had more choice and less training in the official diet, therefore they were able to maintain elements of their previous diets without the direct intervention of the state.

Lilian Cornfeld's book shows us that although it was changing, the official European food discourse in Israel had not disappeared in the seventies. Although falafel and hummus were the kings of Israeli street food—and Cornfeld points out the different "ethnic foods" available in the country—Ashkenazi food was still at the heart of the Israeli public discourse, especially in kibbutz and other institutions.[29] Ashkenazi food was served in school canteens, hospitals, and the kibbutz, and had become the standard institutional food. Kibbutz food and its combination of European food and local ingredients played a fundamental part in the construction of the Israeli identity and the nationalistic way to eat. Even in the seventies, the kibbutz was still a key institution for Israel, although it slowly started losing its place. However important the kibbutz experience was for the formation of Israeli identity, the memories of my participants show the discontent and dissatisfaction that the food served in the collective dining room and children's houses could provoke. It also explains how Israelis started to look for different ways to eat in the privacy of their homes, or even in the public sphere but far away from the kibbutzim dining rooms and the scarce cupboards of the past. These "other" ways to eat, mainly urban were rooted in the experiences of the diaspora, in the Jewish identities of Israelis and in the desire to experience new and consumerist worlds.

[28] Lilian Cornfeld. 1962. *Israeli cookery.* Tel Aviv: Edited by the author.
[29] *Ibid.* p.71-97.

Caviar and champagne for a simple kibbutznik

In contrast with the diet of the kibbutz, the food trends in the cities of Israel changed rapidly after the *Tzena*. Israelis were hungry not only for new culinary experiences but also for the taste of the past.[30] Nonetheless, although the Jewish communities gathered in Israel started looking back at their roots and feeling at least curiosity for the food of their ancestors as well as for those dishes of new and "exotic lands," the European diet never completely disappeared. Some Israelis believe that the obsessions of imposing a European "grey[31]" diet came directly from David Ben-Gurion and the founders of the State. Chen affirmed: "It took several decades for the different immigrant communities to feel free to cook their own food in Israel. They felt that the Israeli thing to do was cooking Polish grey food that was seen as refined, delicate and national. It wasn't until the seventies that this changed. It was David Ben-Gurion who decided that the European food and culture had become the dominant Israeli way of living. But well, I guess he didn´t know better, in the end that was his culture so I suppose I can forgive him for that".

Chicken soup with different varieties of dumplings, Challah bread, chopped liver, beetroot salads, roast potatoes, chicken schnitzel, and stuffed cabbage (just to mention some dishes) mixed with Arab street food like falafel and hummus has been the standard Israeli food since the seventies. It was not until the eighties, as a result of the political changes of the country and the new value given to "ethnic" foods by the Israeli population, that Mizrahi Jews in Israel felt entitled to cook their traditional dishes publicly. They quickly became popular and a matter of pride to the whole population.

However, Mizrahi food never disappeared completely from the privacy of some kitchens. While in the kibbutz Chen ate a standard Israeli pioneer diet, in her Grandmother's kitchen, she learned other ways of eating, according to her "less Israeli and more Jewish." Chen´s grandmother not only fed her with more exciting food than the monotonous cuisine of the communal dinner, but she also had a completely different eating philosophy. She told Chen constantly "if you don't like it you don't eat it" and she let her choose what she wanted to eat and what not to. This way of eating greatly differed from what Chen was used to in the

[30] See Rafi Groslik and Uri Ram. 2013. "Authentic, Speedy and Hybrid: Representations of Chinese Food and Cultural Globalization in Israel", *Food, Culture and Society*, 16(2).

[31] Participants used the word grey to describe Ashkenazi food, in general but especially over-cooked chicken used to make soup.

kibbutz where she had to eat everything whether she liked it or not. The contrast is important, as we can see that while the socialist ideology, the ideas of the first pioneers of an ascetic life with little to no space for pleasure was still alive in the kibbutz, in the city it was disappearing.

This contrast between both ways of eating had a great impact on the way Chen sees food nowadays. She remembered with nostalgia and gratitude the meals she shared with her Moroccan grandmother. Her grandmother cooked traditional Moroccan dishes with whatever ingredients she found available. Chen remembered her grandmother always using turmeric and lemon peel in her dishes, what she didn't know until recently was that her grandmother was trying to substitute saffron and other spices with these ingredients and that "authentic Moroccan food" does not use them. "I didn't know that Moroccan ingredients were either not available in Israel or too expensive for my grandmother, so when I learned to cook, I always used turmeric and not saffron for Moroccan dishes. I still do, that is how my grandmother used to, and I don't care how the real thing is made, I just want to remember her".

Chen's grandmother was not alone in this process of adapting her culinary knowledge to her new conditions. As Richard Wilk points out, substituting ingredients is part of a process of creolization, a violent and complicated process by which a new cuisine is formed.[32] The formation of Israel's food culture matches this process and the way in which Chen's grandmother cooked is an example of it. The substitution of ingredients of the diaspora for cheaper or local ones gave birth to some Israeli dishes, common in the diet of the country, and that can't be found in the countries where they originally came from. For example, boiled kibbeh in lemon or beetroot soup is a popular dish, especially in Jerusalem among Israelis. Although this dish is attributed to the Jewish Iraqi community, it is not prepared in the same way that it was in Bagdad. Iraqi kubbeh is made with ground rice while the Israeli version is made with semolina. The reason behind this substitution was the scarcity of rice in the fifties, so the expensive and rare ingredient was changed for a cheaper and common alternative. Nowadays most restaurants will serve kibbeh made with semolina, and although some older women do remember it was originally made with rice some of them will continue using semolina as is easier than grinding the rice.

[32] Richard Wilk, 2006. *Home Cooking in the Global Village, Caribbean Food from Buccaneers to Ecoturists.* Oxford-New York: Berg. p.120.

The substitution of ingredients for local or cheaper ones contributed to the formation of a new food culture and the reinterpretation of diasporic dishes not only European dishes, but dishes from all of the Jewish communities all around the world. Chickpeas instead of fava beans for falafel, local cheeses from Tsafet for Yemenite food, chicken instead of veal for schnitzel.

Chen's grandmother became her maternal figure and taught her not only how to cook but how to understand and perform the nation. Chen identifies herself as a Mizrahi Jew and looks down at Ashkenazi food culture, and also at Ashkenazi politics and ways of handling the state and the conflict with the Palestinians. At the time I met her, she was furious with the triumph of Benjamin Netanyahu—the right-wing candidate—in the recent elections as she supported left-wing parties including the Arab Join list. Chen learned from her grandmother how to be a Moroccan Jew in Israel and enjoyed her time spent with her. On the other hand, she felt alone and restrained by the food of the kibbutz and the lack of family ties and relates Ashkenazi culture to this stage of her life.

Chen's grandmother's kitchen and the communal dining room of the kibbutz were not the only places where Chen learned how to perform the nation and behave like an Israeli. She spent the summers with her aunt, eating caviar and champagne in the south of Israel close to the sea. "Can you imagine? The simple Israeli girl from the kibbutz was able to eat Russian Caviar in front of the sea in Eilat, that was magic". Chen was convinced that her aunt and uncle were some sorts of spies, working for the Israeli government in Arab countries as she could not explain this sort of life full of luxury in the Israel of the seventies. Through her eyes, the only justification for a life full of privileges in the form of food was explained through an extreme commitment to their country. Chen learned then that there were different kinds of Israeli diet, and different ways of understanding the nation: you could have a life of luxury but still be devoted to Israel, mix traditional dishes from Morocco with local ingredients, or you could follow the spare diet of the kibbutz.

Chen´s upbringing was not uncommon. The contrast between the ascetic life of the kibbutz, the kitchen full of flavours from the past but adapted to the new conditions, and the availability of luxury products, are a reflection of the social situation of the country from the seventies onwards. Chen grew up in a world of contradictions, where tradition, religion, innovation, and different political ideologies and ways of thinking, clashed in the everyday. Her life in the kibbutz was simple and ascetic, and her activities were dictated by a socialist

Zionist worldview. On the other hand, when she visited her Mizrahi grandmother or her aunt, she was able to experiment with different ways of being Israeli and what it meant to be Jewish. Chen is still today a convinced leftist activist, an active member of Meretz. However, she has a soft spot in her heart for caviar and champagne and a profound dislike for Israeli institutional food.

Urban life: "From the Kitchen with Love."

As Chen's story shows, by the seventies it was clear that there was not one unique Israeli diet, and that people cooked and ate depending on their roots, social class, and the place where they lived. By 1975, Israeli food discourse had changed drastically from its origins at the beginning of the twentieth century. As the socialist ideology of the pioneers started fading, Israel's economy became more open to foreign investment and privatization. After the Labour Party lost the elections of 1977, Israeli moved slowly to a free market, and the new right wing Prime Minister, Menachem Begin saw the kibbutz, and the ideology behind it, as the main enemy of his new economic and social vision for the country.[33]

More and more Israelis moved to the city, and by the eighties the dream of the kibbutz was disappearing and most of the population lived in the big cities like Haifa and Tel Aviv or in their suburbs.[34] Israelis in urban contexts changed the way they saw food, the way they cooked, ate and shared their meals.[35] For the first time, entertaining at home became a legitimate activity that did not put that host's commitment to her country in doubt. On the contrary, the post-Socialist Israeli urban middle-class was keen to be "normal". By normal, I refer to the desire, reported in many post-socialist countries, of living according to Western standards of living.[36] In particular, their desire for material goods that were uncommon during the socialist period. Organizing cocktail parties and cooking Western dishes was part of this desire to normalize life, to live behind not only the years of war and scarcity but also the socialist ideals that the founding fathers wanted Israelis to live upon.

[33] Tom Segev, 2002. *Elvis in Jerusalem: Post Zionism and the Americanization of Israel.* Trans. Haim Watzman. New York: Metropolitan Books. p.62

[34] *Ibid*. p.69

[35] Rafi Groslik and Uri Ram. *Op. cit.* p.226.

[36] Krisztina Fehervary.2002. "American Kitchens, Luxury Bathrooms, and the Search for a Normal Life in Postsocialist Hungary, *Ethnos*, 67:3, p.370.

As urban middle-class families started to organize dinner parties for friends and family, the desire for cookbooks explaining how to do this increased, provoking a growth in the publication of recipe books and the rise of an industry that until today is a prolific and successful one. Cookbooks were published to help the housewives of Israel to modernize their kitchens and make their palates more sophisticated. The book that started this kitchen revolution in Israel was *From the Kitchen with Love: the secrets of entertainment.*[37] Ruth Sirkis, the "Queen of Israeli cuisine," published the book through her own publishing house. Sirkis was born in Tel Aviv and studied Social Work at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her career as a food writer started in 1967 when she began writing columns for the magazine *AT*. She then married a diplomat and lived in the United States between 1972 and 1980. In an interview she gave me in March 2015 in Tel Aviv, she described her travels and food experiences by saying they were "Not just recipes, I wrote about places all over the world where you can find good food because I travel a lot with my husband. I wrote about California, New York, Las Vegas, New Orleans, about food, places, restaurants hotels, vineyards in France, in Germany and in England, Chekoslovakia, and then I wrote about food in Japan, that I visited, as well as Singapore, Korea, Hong Kong, Australia and South Africa".

The author wrote the book while she was living with her husband in Los Angeles and entertaining hundreds of guests every month, as part of her diplomatic duties. She decided to publish her book as she noticed that in Israel women were starting to invite friends over and they wanted to organize cocktails parties, afternoon teas, and dinners. "My duty was to create relations with people my husband wanted to entertain, and you make good relations at the table. Sometimes I had 15 people for a party in my house, other times 20, so I made a buffet. In other occasions I had 6 guests for tea. This was new in Israel, because you either had your family or friends over, they were not used to these events. My inspiration for the recipes came from going to the best restaurants and being invited to the houses of very rich people; they always had the best. I took the inspiration from books and traveling. It is a work that is not simple, it has a lot of layers".

Although Ruth Sirkis' book would become Israel's most popular cookbook (and it remains so), selling over a million copies, in 1975 its publication was not easy.[38] Some

[37] Ruth Sirkis. 1975. *From the Kitchen with Love: Secrets of entertaining* [Hebrew]. 5th ed. Ramat Gan: Sirkis.
[38] Nir Avieli, 2018. *Op. cit.* p.26.

publishers had the impression that Israel was not ready for this kind of cookbook, a cookbook that was not concerned with scarcity but with the pleasure of eating, a book that revealed the new living standards of the urban Israeli middle-class as well as their desire to be seen as part of Western society. Krisztina Fehervary, in her study about post-socialist Hungary, points out that this craving for consumer goods also reveals that people had maintained the expectation of a Western -style standard of living at least on their private lives, a place in which the state, at least superficially, had less control than in the public sphere.[39] In the case of Israel, the popularity of Sirkis' book not only reveals a desire for normality, but also, a longing for a Western-type of life, a longing that the European Jews had, even before immigrating to Israel.

Ofer Vadi, the editor of *Lunchbox*, confirmed that Sirkis wanted to publish the book several years before, but the economic crisis made publishers believe that a recipe book for entertaining was a waste of their time. Sirkis then decided to open her own publishing house and edit her own cookbooks. *From the Kitchen with Love* is the first modern Israeli cookbook, and it is possible to find it in the houses of most middle-class Israelis. However, it was not easy at the beginning, as according to Vadi it was seen as something superfluous. Although in our interview Sirkis did not agree with the idea of her book being perceived as something superfluous; she did say that nobody believed her book was going to be as successful as it still is: "The first edition was 5000, and they were sold immediately. They didn't believe it was going to be that successful, but in few months, it sold 17,000. This year [2015] it has been 40 years since its publication. The publishers decided to recognise the book in the Jerusalem book fair. They called the event "From the Kitchen with Love, the book that changed the history of Israeli cuisine." The organizers invited a lot of people to the event and talked about the book and so on. A lot of the guests were publishers since we ourselves are publishers (she and her husband) and we know them well. One of the publishers that is the head of the Publisher Organization of Israel said it is not only that this book changed the way Israelis saw food and cooked, but it also changed the Israeli publishing industry because it was so successful that it became the model for other cookbooks. This book established the measurements for all the cookbooks; it was the model for later publishing".

[39] Krisztina Fehervary.*op. cit.,* p.372.

From the Kitchen with Love was one the first cookbooks in the long list of successful publications by Ruth Sirkis. It established a new way of eating and entertaining in the Israeli home. The book covers different types of parties from cocktails to formal dinners and the fashionable "fondue parties" of the seventies. It not only includes recipes, but it also explains to Israeli housewives how to set the table for different occasions, which dishes are appropriate for each occasion and which are the best ways of serving them.[40] It is still a must have in an Israeli kitchen, a common gift for brides, and the name is familiar to almost everybody in Israel. It did not include Middle Eastern recipes. On the contrary, it introduced the Israeli reader to the trendiest culinary fashions of the West, particularly of the United States.

The book was the beginning of Israel´s food revolution. It manifested the new ethos in cooking, a new way of leisure that reflected the ideological and economic changes of the country as well as the aspirations for the sophistication of the middle-class. The socialist ethos was losing popularity, and Ruth Sirkis' books are proof of the desires of the middle-class to leave austerity and nationalism in the past. Choosing and consuming the nation were not the priorities of the urban middle-class, who wanted to become more cosmopolitan and enjoy the pleasures of foreign food and traditions. Israel was living some years of relative peace and, therefore, the population felt they had the chance to experiment with behaviours that were believed to be anti-patriotic in the past. Fine dining, fast food chains and the rise of meat consumption showed the willingness of Israelis to enjoy the economic bonanza of the country and their determination for leaving behind the times of the *Tzena* and the kibbutz world.

Urban life: a taste for the exotic

From the Kitchen with Love was followed by another successful book by Ruth Sirkis. But this time, her goal was not to teach how to serve a proper Western high tea but to show the Israelis how to cook Chinese food. The book *The Chinese Cuisine*, written in 1979, was the first Chinese food book written in Hebrew, and showed the willingness and desire of Israelis to explore new cuisines and exotic flavours that allowed them to travel, at least in culinary terms, to faraway lands.[41] However, Sirkis' book, which sold 15 million copies, was not based on her

[40] *Loc. cit.*
[41] Ruth Sirkis. 1979. *The Chinese Cuisine*. Tel Aviv: Ma'ariv-Bayit ve´Gan Library.

extensive travels In China but on her knowledge of Chinese restaurants in American cities.[42] The book is an attempt to bring home what was happening on the streets of Tel Aviv: a new love for fine dining took hold of Israelis, however, it was not French cuisine what they were looking for, but Chinese food. This trend was yet another reflection of what was happening in Israeli society: a rise in consumerism and a change in the way Israelis perceived food. Food started to be seen as a legitimate source of pleasure and not only as a means of survival that expressed the collectivist ideology of the first decades.

During the seventies and eighties, Chinese restaurants appeared in Tel Aviv attracting a professional middle-class that was thirsty for new and exotic experiences that could prove their cosmopolitanism and good taste. Foreign cuisine restaurants were preferred by the middle classes above Israeli food "eateries" and Chinese food became particularly popular.[43] Eating Chinese food was not only a novelty, but it was part of the normalization phenomenon described previously.[44] In his study about consumption of Chinese food in Bulgaria, Yuson Jung suggests that Bulgarians consumed Chinese food in order to not only feel normal, in a Westerner style, but also to affirm their socio-cultural position within the global order.[45] What happened in Israel was similar to the phenomenon observed by Yuson in Bulgaria. Eating in Chinese restaurants became a marker of normality, a normality measured by Western standards of living. Those first middle-class urban consumers of Chinese food didn't have any preoccupation with authenticity and instead tried to imitate what they imagined as a Western normal life, that included eating out in Chinese restaurants.

In 1981, the famous chef Yisrael Aharoni opened his restaurant Yin-Yang in Rothschild Boulevard, one of the most expensive streets in Tel Aviv.[46] Aharoni said: "A friend of mine ate my food and said I had to open a restaurant. And I did. It was the first Chinese restaurant in Tel Aviv. In 1981. In a blink of an eye, it was an immediate success. Chinese food was so new then. There weren't that many restaurants, and food culture wasn't big then. Chinese dishes and chopsticks were new. Nobody knew how to eat with chopsticks. As a result, in the next

[42] Rafi Groslik and Uri Ram, 2013. *Op. cit.* pp.226.
[43] Rafi Groslik and Uri Ram*, Op. cit.* p.229.
[44] Yuson Jung 2012. "Experiencing the West Through the East in the Margins of Europe". *Food, Culture and Society* 15(4) p.580.
[45] *Ibid.*p.581.
[46] *Ibid.*p.231.

decade, after I opened my restaurant, there were 17 Chinese restaurants in Tel Aviv. It was so popular, and I am arguably one of the first people who brought Chinese food to Israel."[47]

Aharoni had studied culinary arts in Taiwan and returned to Israel ready to open the Israeli palates to new experiences. His restaurant was not cheap and it was not authentic Chinese cuisine. His version of Chinese food, as well as the one presented in Sirkis's book, was an Americanized and kosher version of Asian flavours. As Jung suggests, the consumption of foreign food, or exotic or new food is not only a result of the localization/globalization dichotomy but of the willingness of the consumer to position himself in the global context and is part of a process of identity formation.[48]

In the case of Israel, Chinese food was not only preferred because it was the "normal Western" thing to do, but it was chosen over other cuisines because it was seen as neutral; it did not have any moral or historical connotation for Israelis. It was new, exotic and had never been anti-Semitic; it was a recipe for success. Aharoni became the first celebrity chef in Israel, writing more than 20 cookbooks and hosting several TV shows, as the trend for eating Chinese food was also adopted in the Israeli household. Nonetheless, in the eighties, it was still difficult to find some key ingredients for Chinese food like ginger, which was unavailable. On the other hand, Israelis only wanted to taste the flavour of the exotic, so dishes using the well-known aubergine were not an option "We are the kings of aubergine. How dare anybody else - not to mention those Chinese - dare to prepare aubergine? So actually, people were like aubergine in Chinese food? No way".[49]

The consumption of Chinese food became "normalized" in Israel during the 80s and by the 90s it was synonymous with fast, cheap food. The Israeli middle-class became more preocuppied with the authenticity of the food they were eating, they started traveling more and looking for "real Asian flavours". Japanese food, a localized version of it that includes deep fried sushi rolls, became popular among not only the middle-class, but Orthodox Jews as it is common to find kosher sushi restaurants all over the country. It is only in recent

[47] Wei, C. 2012. LA Weekly. [Online].
Available at: http://www.laweekly.com/restaurants/q-and-a-with-yisrael-aharoni-israeli-celebrity-chef-chinese-food-in-israel-hollywood-being-a-dj-2379407.
[Last access: 18 September 2015].
[48] Yuson Jung. *op. cit.,* p.584.
[49] *Loc. cit.*

decades that Chinese food has again won a place on the upper middle-class table, a lot of the times mixed with other Asian flavours.[50]

The never-ending Israeli breakfast

While the appetite for foreign flavours of the Israeli middle-class grew, the popularity of "Israeli food" also rose among tourists, especially Jewish tourists. As mentioned previously, Israeli authorities were anxious to give the country an image of tolerance and multiethnicity, and used food to convey it. Hotels and restaurants started to offer foreigners an authentic Israeli culinary experience. Authenticity then took the form of Israeli breakfast, normally a lavish buffet that emphasised the use of local ingredients like oranges, olives, olive oil, and vegetables. The Israeli breakfast not only showcased all the products Israelis felt proud to produce but also reinterpreted the kibbutz food and sold it as "traditional Israeli food".[51] This breakfast —mentioned by all of my participants when talking about "authentic Israeli food"— is always kosher, and was and still is catered for Jewish tourists that want to feel at home in the Jewish state while also admiring also the "miracles" of Israeli agriculture. Chopped salad, raw vegetables, fresh cheeses produced in local farms in the Galilee were sold (and still are) as part of the authentic Israel experience but were mixed with gherkins, pickled herring, and bagels, food that tourists, European Jews, and non-Jews could relate to Jewish food. But although the "authentic Israeli breakfast" is still popular in 5-star hotels in Eilat and Tel Aviv, Israelis do not identify with it:

> [The journey] starts at your hotel, where you are served this extravaganza called an Israeli breakfast boasting B-type pickled fish, yesterday´s croissants and salads that you are likely to meet again during lunch and dinner. And you think to yourself: Oy, the abundance! How fresh! Straight from the Kibbutz to the plate! Well sorry to break it to you, it does not come from a Kibbutz, more likely from a supermarket. And it isn´t always fresh, and it most definitely is not what we, Israelis, eat every single day (pickled fish for breakfast? What are we, beasts?!)[52]

[50] Rafi Groslik and Uri Ram. *Op. cit.* p.230.
[51] Israeli Food Guide. Accessed 10 September 2017. http://www.israel-food-guide.com/israeli-breakfast.php.
[52] G,.H.Halpern. 2012. *Confessions of a Kitchen Rebbetzin*. Moshav Ben-Shemen: Toad Publishing and Modan Publishing House LTD p.13.

Although the experience sold in hotels for tourists was not what an Israeli would eat at home, it contributed to the professionalization of cooks in Israel that little by little were gaining respect in the country. It was also a key factor in the growth of the food industry and the later introduction of French and Italian cuisine to Israelis.[53] Of course, as time went by, this breakfast became a source of pride. Ariel, one of my participants, for example, does not like going on holidays to the beach. However, he never misses a family holiday in Eilat as he knows the hotels where they stay will serve an Israeli breakfast and, for him, that is reason enough to go.

By the beginning of the 1980s, the Israeli breakfast buffet represented the changes in the foodways of Israelis. It showed the willingness of the Israeli authorities and tourism industries to sell an image of multiculturalism instead of one of homogeneity, of progress and of respect for local ingredients. Israelis started to use food then to create a national identity but also to sell it to foreigners and to market themselves as not only a multicultural country but a Jewish one where Jewish tourists could feel at home.

However, although foreigners were looking for the authentic flavour of Israel, Israelis had a craving for the exotic and for new flavours. As the decades of the eighties advanced, the interest in "ethnic" cuisine also grew. Ethnic cuisine was the term used to refer to Jewish Mizrahi food, and it was not until the eighties that Israelis with Arab origins felt comfortable enough to publicly cook their own food. Hava explained to me while talking about her Iraqi husband: "before the eighties, the food that my mother-in-law grew up eating was seen as a back guard and unhealthy. It was labour-intensive, and we were told that modern Israeli women did not have the time to sit for hours and stuff vegetables. But in the eighties, we were finally able to cook whatever we wanted. You didn't need to be a European kibbutznik eating chicken soup to be a real Israeli, you could eat kubbeh, and it was fine, you were as Israeli as the others." Mizrahi restaurants and certain dishes in particular like Iraqi kubbeh or sabih[54] became popular, and Mizrahi, as well as Ashkenazi, started enjoying these flavours in the streets of Tel Aviv or in their grandmother's kitchens. Although the intention of the

[53] Yael Raviv, op. cit., p.160.

[54] Sabih is now a popular street food in Israel that is believed to have Jewish Iraqi origins. It consists of a pita bread stuffed with amba (mango pickle), fried aubergines, overnight boiled eggs, chopped salad and tahini. There are some variations that include hummus or feta cheese. It is believed it is based on the staple dishes of the Iraqi Shabbat breakfast, but it is possible that it was invented much later in Israel.

Ashkenazi establishment was to create a new diet based on European traditions, Mizrahi food became more popular, and even now it is still winning the battle for Israeli stomachs.

The battle for Israeli food

By the 1980s, Mizrahi food was winning a definite place in the Israeli kitchen, and people decided to search for their culinary roots. The Labour Party had lost the election of 1977, and it was clear that the socialist ideology of the kibbutz and the pioneers was losing its popularity.[55] The intention of creating a unique national homogeneous identity had failed, and the differences of class, ethnicity and religion were suddenly clearer than before. These differences were marketed by authorities as multiculturalism and diversity, although they excluded the Palestinians from this mix. At that time. Mizrahim started to feel more comfortable opening restaurants and food business and Europeans Jews were willing to taste these "ethnic cuisines." Simultaneously, Ashkenazi Jews also felt the need to go back to their roots and started consuming nostalgic cookbooks that helped them to learn how their families cooked in the Old World.

According to Hava by the 1980s those ingredients that previously were not available in Israel as well as recipe books from all over the world became easy to find. Nostalgic cookbooks as well as self-published books with recipes from the family's country of origin became common, and is still possible to find an impressive variety of them. Most of my participants of European origin were unable to learn how to cook from their mothers or grandmothers as the Holocaust and immigration to Israel had caused the transmission of culinary knowledge from generation to generation to break. Cookbooks explaining the dishes that were sunk deep in their memories were fundamental in reproducing the food of the exile. Hava as well as Ayala, another of my participants who was in her sixties and from Hungarian origins, both learned how to cook Hungarian food from cookbooks. Hava, for example, remembered with deep nostalgia the first time his father cooked a goulash: "I still recall it perfectly; the smell, the taste, I have never been able to cook it like that. It was the first time my father had seen his brother in more than 25 years, and they cooked it together. They didn't know their mother's recipe as she died when they were really young. But they tried to do it by memory and, at least for me, it was perfect. After that, they started buying Hungarian

[55] Colin Schindler. *op. cit.* p.148.

cookbooks and tried to cook the dishes of their past. My husband did the same with Iraqi food; he bought every cookbook he could, to try to find the flavours he remembered from Baghdad."

The importance of cookbooks in reproducing recipes from the past was explained to me by Rahel, who pointed out the need to find ways to substitute the oral transmission of knowledge: "It was in the eighties that the boom of ethnic food started (Mizrahi food), and it would not have happened if we had not had the possibility of buying all kinds of cookbooks. The Ashkenazi hegemony was over, and Jewish communities from Arab countries were able to publicly appreciate their roots. After that, Ashkenazi food didn´t have a chance, Mizrahi food won the battle for the Israeli table, maybe because Ashkenazi food was related to the kibbutz and army food and that was simply awful. The Mizrahi food was also influenced by Arab street food and became easy to find everywhere and eat it on the move. Israeli institutions decided to stop their attempt to change the traditions of everybody and accept that we are not some Western bourgeoisie ladies."

Cookbooks allowed people from different communities to cook the way their parents did. They did not look for the flavours of other diasporic communities; they only looked for the dishes related to their own roots. Iraqis recovered dishes such as kibbe in beetroot soup, and Moroccans celebrated again *Mimuna*[56] and invited their neighbours to try their sweets. Little by little, the tendency to return to their roots became acceptable not only in the Israeli household but on the streets, first Jerusalem and then trendy Tel Aviv.

However, the popularity of Mizrahi food was not easily accepted. Although the majority of my participants believe that Mizrahi food is simply better, some others had different opinions. Josef, a young Ashkenazi food journalist that I interviewed, explained it like this "Why did Mizrahi food won? Because they won in everything. Why is Yiddish not the official language? Why is Moroccan slang trendier in Hebrew than Yiddish slang? It's a counter-reaction to a lot of things. It won because the Ashkenazis are willing to go out of their comfort food but not the other way around, nobody wants to try gefilte fish. We made mistakes along the way; this is a clear reaction to the State, the Ashkenazi entity, they say "the Ashkenazi's are so bad that even its food is bad." That is why Jewish (Ashkenazi) Restaurants are disappearing". Ayala also did not feel comfortable with the idea of Mizrahi

[56] A Moroccan holiday that celebrates the end of Passover.

food being better than Ashkenazi food. She told me that as a Hungarian, she was offended when people confused her food with Polish food "My food is not the boring grey food, and all Mizrahi food is not necessarily good. I don't like the idea that Mizrahi food won, they haven't won it is just that we are willing to taste their food while they are not willing to taste ours. Their food is cheaper also."

Ayala and Josef did not feel comfortable with the idea of Mizrahi food as the winner of the "Israeli cook-off" and Josef attributed this preference to political events, while Ayala attributed it to an erroneous classification of Ashkenazi food. However, their opinions are not shared with the official discourse of Israel, that tries to sell this image of multiculturality to foreigners. One clear example of the authorities' attempt to promote the Israeli diet, and one in which this official discourse is tangible is the cookbook published by the Israeli Embassy in Washington in 1995: *Israel Beyond the Land of Milk and Honey.*

Changing Israel's image: *Beyond Milk and Honey*

As the decade of the nineties advanced, the fragmentation of Israeli society became deeper and clearer, not only for the local population but also to the exterior. Israel was also being perceived by the international community as an oppressor and not a victim, especially after the 1987-1991 intifada, a Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation. With the aim of improving their image and showing the world that Israeli society was multicultural, tolerant and diverse, the government returned to food and used it once again as a tool of propaganda. The best example of this is *Israel Beyond the Land of Milk and Honey,* an online book available on the website of the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs and edited by the Israeli Embassy in Washington. It has been modified several times since 1995, with the last edition being from 2002.[57]

Israel Beyond the Land of Milk and Honey is one of the best examples of the effort of the Israeli government to change the negative image of the country in the international arena. By presenting a "cultural mosaic" of the country, they try to attract tourists to Israel and gain sympathy from people around the world. Therefore, the book can be read in English, Hebrew, Russian and Arabic. Although it is an initiative of the Embassy in Washington, it can be found

[57] Ministry of Foreign Affairs.2002. *Israel Beyond the Land of Milk and Honey* [Last access 1st August 2017]. http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/israelexperience/lifestyle/pages/beyond%20milk%20and%20honey%20-%20israeli%20recipes%20-%20jan-95.aspx

on the website of the Ministry so anyone researching Israeli foreign affairs, Israeli food, or anyone interested in a general knowledge of the country can access it. The book starts by explaining that although the Biblical origin of Israeli cuisine is undeniable, it now has a "longstanding culinary heritage." It states that a couple of years ago even the Israelis doubted the existence of an authentic Israeli cuisine, but that nowadays, it "is a distinctive cuisine that reflects the various communities in the country." It is not clear in the introduction when this Israeli cuisine was created or what do the authors mean by "authentic." The use of the term authentic is puzzling as a quick look at the recipe index leaves no doubt about the multiplicity of origins (from meat borscht and chicken curry to falafel) of the recipes provided.

The book is a mixture of Ashkenazi and Middle Eastern recipes, but it also includes a recipe for curry attributed to the Jewish community of India. The Middle Eastern recipes are given a Jewish origin, like hummus and falafel, and the book states that Jews from Middle Eastern countries took these dishes to Israel. Other recipes have fewer explanations, and the book does not state how they became popular in Israel. The vegetable section highlights agricultural products like avocados and the introduction for the carrot salad affirms that "When Israelis abroad long for their homeland, they recall the incomparable tastes of Israel's fruits and vegetables." As a final note, the book includes a recipe for Turkish coffee. It not only recognises its foreign origin, but it also claims that the day Israel makes peace with its neighbours, it will be over a cup of Turkish coffee.[58]

Israel Beyond the Land of Milk and Honey puts together a selection of recipes that point out the diverse origin of the Israeli population and the farming achievements of Israelis. It tries to present a unified Israeli diet when the rural and urban differences, as well as the ethnic ones, are part of a cultural mosaic that enriches Israeli culture and makes visiting the country much more interesting for a foreigner. However, it does not recognise the presence of Palestinians and Palestinian food and traditions in this mix and attributes all Middle Eastern recipes to Jewish immigrants. It also does not talk about Ashkenazi food and simply gives a label of "Jewish traditional food" to European recipes while Mizrahi recipes become ethnic.

Israel Beyond the Land of Milk and Honey is an attempt by the Israeli government to promote an image of tolerance and multiethnicity in which all traditions have a place and in which peace is a possibility. Although it does recognise the influence of other culinary

[58] *Loc. cit.*

traditions like the Turkish, it denationalizes any other dish from the region and attributes most of them to Jewish communities. By hiding the Arab origins of dishes and highlighting the Jewish ones, a multicultural image becomes easier to project to the world. As mentioned previously, by the nineties Israel had left the melting pot ideology in the past and used the diversity of its population to project a friendlier image. Food was a tool in this process, a method of soft power known as "gastrodiplomacy."

Conclusion

The experiences of Hava and Chen illustrate the tensions between diasporic food and local food, Mizrahi and Ashkenazi food, as well as the differences between rural and urban Israel. They also point out how Israelis in different contexts build different food cultures that would eventually merge—although never blend—in what Israelis know now as their national culinary culture. These differences in the way urban and rural Israelis perceived food reflected some of the divisions within Israeli society as well as the difficulties in creating the homogenous national identity that the elites aimed for.

In the first few decades after the establishment of the state, Israeli authorities decided to continue promoting the homogenization of the diet, and in fact of the people, and to create a Hebrew man and a Hebrew diet. Although moved by a melting pot ideal, they privileged European food and set aside Middle Eastern cooking. The diet was also shaped by the lifestyle of the kibbutz, its simple, ascetic and unproblematic cooking eventually became the food that mixed with Ashkenazi dishes, was served in most Israeli institutions like hospitals, government cafeterias, and the army. It even became the basis of the popular Israeli breakfast, a source of national pride that has become the first encounter with Israeli food for tourists.

Although undeniably influential, the food culture of the kibbutz is missed by few and remembered as monotonous and flavourless. Chen and Hilla remembered not only the taste but the consequences the communal dining hall had on their lives. Monotone food, bad cooking and no options reflected the way food was perceived in the kibbutz during the first decades of the life of Israel, as well as the lack of importance and respect given to traditionally female tasks like cooking. The stoic, communal lifestyle of the kibbutzim together with the belief that children should be raised separated from their parents to liberate mothers, made their childhood completely different from those of urban Israeli children. Still, some women

did not see the separation from their children as liberating, and searched for ways that allowed them to take care of their children even if they were not under the same roof. Baking became a female tool through which mothers could rebel against what the nation expected from them and allowed them to make emotional connection with their families and to take care of their children. The women of the kibbutz used private cooking as a way to express individuality and to gain agency even when it meant putting their nationalistic duties in second place.

On the other hand, the cities became cosmopolitan and reflected the willingness of Israelis to try new exotic flavours which they did not had accessed previously. Asian flavours became popular on the streets of Tel Aviv, and even today thousands of sushi restaurants populate the city. Chinese food, "Western style"was the first taste of exotic fine dining that the Israeli middle-class experimented with during the seventies. However, it lost its exotic taste by the eighties and became cheap, fast food.[59]

From the seventies, the appetite for new flavours was not confined to the kitchens of restaurants but was also reflected in home cooking. In the privacy of their homes, urban Israelis started hosting lavish parties and left the scarcity and the idea that food was not be enjoyed in the past. Ruth Sirkis' books reflected that willigness of Israelis to innovate and host parties in a Western style. But while Isralis showed their williginess to try new flavours they were simultaneously fighting a battle between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi food to determine which of them was more national. Although some dishes like *ptitim*[60], schnitzel and hummus became popular among Israelis from every ethnic background; European and Middle Eastern cooking never melted together, and families kept their traditions even if they were seen as "ethnic". The melting pot did not produce the mix that was expected by the Israeli establishment, and an amalgam of diets are still part of everyday Israeli life.

The last decades of Israeli history have seen a change in the society and the tables of Israelis. The tendency to privilege the collective well-being and sacrifice individual pleasure was left behind, as well as the lifestyle of the kibbutz, and a consumerist society, ready to taste new flavours from faraway places emerged. Israelis opened their minds and taste buds to Chinese flavours but modified the recipes to be in accordance with Jewish religious laws.

[59] Rafi Groslik and Uri Ram*. Op. cit.* p.232.
[60] The Israeli version of the Italian fregola.

Years later fast food chains also appeared in Israel and again were modified to the local taste, blending local needs and preferences with global trends. However, tradition has never disappeared from the Israeli table and Jewish holidays and dishes are still a prominent characteristic of Israeli national identity.

Chapter 4. Israel: A Kosher nation?

In 1953 Esther Friedman arrived in Israel with her Israeli husband. She is around 80 now, and she continues to be a lively, active woman. Contrary to the will of her daughters, she even drives. However, her daughters live close by and keep a vigilant watch over her. They call her several times everyday, and they see each other to have dinner together on Fridays, and for lunch on Saturdays. Esther's cooking is typically Ashkenazi, and she never experiments with other flavours for the Friday dinner, although she told me thousands of times that her favourite food was in fact Asian. She enjoys going to restaurants especially to an Asian restaurant close to her house, and she planned to take me there several times, but her daughters did not allow her as they insisted I was not interested in Asian food. Esther cooks and bakes frequently, and she enjoys not only cooking but eating.

Almost every Friday dinner Esther sat next to me. She was always willing to tell me stories of her youth in Canada and Israel and of her mother. But one Friday, she was not as happy as usual. I asked her what was going on and she replied to me: "You know every Friday morning there is a food market in the Dizengoff Centre[1] right? Well, there is a stall that sells sushi, and you know I love Asian food, so every Friday I go there, and I eat something". She then looked at me with a big smile, and giggling continued, "well every Friday I have a shrimp, they are really good, I like them, but I only allow myself to have one, and today, they were really small. The boy that sells them told me to have another one, he knows me as I go every week, but I told him I couldn't have two, I only have one". Ruth suddenly turned her attention to our conversation and asked her "do they sell shrimps in the mall? That is not right, the Minister of Health probably does not know about this". Esther looked at me searching for a crime partner and quietly said: "oh who cares; they are really good, I'm sure they are fresh and clean."

By eating a shrimp every Friday, Esther was breaking *kashrut*, and she was doing this every week before the beginning of Shabbat. Esther is not a religious woman. Therefore, it wasn't a surprise that she did not keep kosher. She had fought with her mother all of her adult life about how unpractical it was keeping Shabbat and had never shown any interest in praying, going to the Synagogue or any other religious ritual. But what was actually

[1] A popular shopping mall in central Tel Aviv.

inexplicable to me was that she only broke kosher laws on Fridays, and that the way she talked about it and her refusal to eat the second shrimp made clear she saw this as a social transgression. Esther, in her everyday life, kept kosher, cooked traditional Ashkenazi food and believed eating seafood was wrong, so she only "allowed herself" a little treat. From a young age, Esther was constantly trying to break with tradition. She had traveled alone with her babies around Israel in a pickup van, looking for a sense of modernity, for anything new arriving at the Port of Haifa or Tel Aviv. She also avoided visiting Jerusalem as she felt asphyxiated by the orthodox communities living in the Holy City and she was open about her dislike for the city. She never seemed too concerned about politics, and she never gave her opinion about them, she did not enjoy speaking Hebrew and only read fiction in English. She had studied for a Master's degree and had worked all her life. At the time that I met her, she was still living alone and unwilling to change any part of her life.

Nonetheless, Esther's table, as well as her daughter's kitchen, were kosher. It was not only kosher, but her cooking was also traditionally Jewish, she did not experiment with foreign flavours and the only innovations she had incorporated were "Israeli dishes" like hummus and tahini. None of her recipes were family recipes, she had learned them from newspapers and cookbooks. Her mother, she said, was a terrible cook, so she had nothing to learn from her. Esther didn't seem too concerned with tradition or religion so, what was stopping her from eating two shrimps, why did she feel it was a mischief? What made her continue cooking traditional Ashkenazi kosher food? What did it mean for her to keep kosher even when she was not religious?

These questions continued dazzling me during my time in Israel. Not all of my participants kept kosher, and those who did understood kosher in hundreds of different ways. For some it was separating meat from dairy, for others, it was not eating pork or seafood, and for others, it all depended on where they were and who they were with. Some of them kept kosher in their houses but not in public, some in Israel and not outside, and some of them had stopped keeping kosher when they moved to Israel. When Esther eats a shrimp every Friday, she is not simply breaking kosher laws; she's consciously rebelling against her religious Eastern European past and highlighting the secular aspects of her Israeli identity. She is resisting the official dietary laws of the state by eating shrimps in a public place that probably do not have the authorization to sell them. She is also embracing the cosmopolitanism of life in Tel Aviv by choosing to eat Asian food in a shopping mall. Simultaneously, her unwillingness

to let go of Ashkenazi food shows us not only "nostalgia" for the times of the diaspora and the traditions developed in it, but also the importance of transmitting cultural and national Jewish identity to her family through the privacy of her dinner table.

By consuming shrimp on Fridays, a few hours before Shabbat starts, Esther is resisting a State imposition on her identity. But more importantly, in the same way, she is consistently vocal that she prefers Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, she eats shrimp to break social convention and to find what Michael E. Gardiner denominates "redemptive moments." [2] Redemptive moments are transgressive actions that have the purpose, made consciously or unconsciously, of creating some distance from social conventions and restrictions without breaking from the social order. It is done in the frame of the everyday life and does not necessarily break the behavioural codes imposed by the state on the individuals.[3]

The possibility of breaking the quotidian not through extraordinary events but through actions, allows the individual to change their experience and shape their routine. Breaking these habits might result in tensions between the individual and the "codes of conduct preferred by the state" or not. [4]

Kosher laws are used by my participants to resist and rebel against the limitations imposed on them as a result of the agreements between the Israeli government and the Jewish Orthodox religious authorities. Examples of these limitations are the lack of public transport from Friday afternoon to Saturday evening and the closure of many businesses during the same time. Kosher laws imply direct control of the state over the individual, in which the authorities have the power to decide what its population should or should not eat. Redemptive moments, mundane acts of resistance, allow individuals to assert their agency to show individual understandings of Israeliness; and unconformity with the religious status quo. In this chapter, I will contend that contrary to the Jewish communities in the diaspora where keeping kosher has become a mechanism to avoid assimilation: in Israel, the *haloni* population uses it to negotiate or resist the behavioural impositions of the state, a state that links religious identity with national identity. In other words, the Israeli secular population has developed a set of tools and techniques that allow them to gain agency without completely breaking the social order or making themselves anti-national. As explained in Chapter 4,

[2] See Michael E. Gardiner. 2000. *Critique of Everyday life,* London-New York: Routledge.
[3] Tim Edensor. 2002. National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life. Oxford-New York: Berg. p.91
[4] *Loc. cit.*

Jewishness is one of the main characteristics of Israeli national identity, to become Jewish means to become national. However, as I will illustrate in this chapter, once a person belongs to the national community, she has the right to rebel against certain impositions, as some of my participants argue to "complain against the state." Not keeping kosher represents a tool by which individuals can resist the state without breaking apart from the national community and without putting their belonging to the Jewish collectivity in doubt. In Israel keeping kosher or not is a sign of Jewishness but also, in some cases, the position the individual holds in relation to the power the religious status quo can exert over their everyday life.[5] It can also be away of connecting with ancestors, a tradition that is taken as a given, without thinking about it too much. It is sometimes rationalized by stating that non-kosher food, particularly pork, smells "disgusting". Most *haloni* (secular) Israelis will also only follow those laws that adapt to their lifestyle and will pick and choose rules according to where they are and who they are with.

Although keeping kosher is a key aspect of Israeli food culture, there is no ethnographic research available in English on this topic. Although the research focusing on dietary religious laws started with the with the work of Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger,* and are vast, their relation to the construction of Israel´s national identity has received little scholarly attention.[6]

What is kashrut?

As mentioned previously, kosher laws are a system of dietary practices that have been followed by the Jewish people since the times of the Exodus. These rules are encoded in the *Torah* (the Jewish Bible) and are divided into three categories: those defining the animal which may or may not be consumed, those prohibiting the consumption of blood, and those prohibiting the cooking of a calf in its mother´s milk.[7] This last one has been understood as the prohibition of mixing dairy products with meat. There are also lesser known rules related to which state the lungs of animals need to be in to be able to consider them kosher, as well

[5] Andrew Buckser. 1999. "Keeping Kosher: Eating and Social Identity among the Jews of Denmark" *Ethnology* 38 (3), p.194.

[6] See, Mary Douglas. 1984. *Purity and Danger*. London: Routledge.
For examples of contemporary research in kosher laws see Andrew Buckser, *op. cit*. and Anna Shternshis. 2015. "Salo on Challah: Soviet Jews Experiences of Food in the 1920-1950s" in ed. Anat Helman. *Jews and their Foodways*, New York: Oxford University Press.

[7] David C. Kraemer. 2007. *Jewish Eating and Identity through the Ages*, London-New York: Routledge. p.10

as the time one should wait before having dairy after eating meat. Tradition, the fear of breaking them without being aware of it, and Rabbinical ruling have further developed and modified these laws.

Keeping kosher is not an easy task. It is not cheap either. Kosher meat is approximately 20% more expensive than non-kosher, and the quality is not necessarily better.[8] Buying kosher food is not the only reason why keeping kosher is more expensive: having separate dishes, fridges, sinks and cooking tools from meat and dairy put an extra cost on the family budget. It is also time-consuming, as, for example, a strictly kosher cook will have to check under a special light if there are bugs in vegetables like lettuce or spinach as insects are not kosher. There are hundreds of different kosher certifications, and each orthodox group follows their own, making it complicated not only to mix with those who do not keep kosher but also with those who followed another Rabbinical certification. While I was doing my fieldwork in 2015, I was invited to have dinner with an orthodox family in Jerusalem. When I asked Esther what should I bring to the dinner she just told me "Ohh who knows who is their Rabbi, just give them flowers although they will probably throw them out anyway!" Esther's comments made me see that a number of rules followed by Orthodox Jews were as unknown and complicated for *haloni* (secular) Israelis as they were for me, as most of them did not encounter them on everyday basis and were not used to keeping a strictly kosher diet or reading labels indicating who supervised the preparation of food products.

Contrary to what happens in *haloni* households, observing kosher is the most significant and important religious duty of a Jewish Orthodox woman. While men are expected to go to synagogue and pray, women´s religious obligations are centred in the household. Cooking and making sure everything that is eaten by their family is kosher is women's most important duty. Susan Starr Sered points out that "*Kashrut* raises food preparation from a task that every woman in the world unthinkingly does in order to put food on her family´s table to a religious ritual par excellence".[9] Cooking is especially important and visible in the celebration of holidays such as Passover, however keeping kosher is a daily task and keeping a kosher house has the same relevance as any ritual performed by men in synagogues. Most orthodox religious women learn from their mothers and grandmothers

[8] Yael Miller. 2011. "The Cost of Keeping Kosher", *Haaretz,* Accessed May 20, 2016, haartez.com.
[9] Susan Starr Sered. 1996. *Women as Ritual Experts: The Religious Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem,* New York: Oxford University Press. p.88.

how to keep a Jewish household, how to cook kosher food, and how to keep a kosher house. As orthodox women are excluded from most ritual practices outside the home, keeping kosher is the fundamental female obligation. However, most secular women in Israel, including my participants, although familiar with kosher rules will choose not to follow them or to accommodate them according to their lifestyles. Nowadays, although 40% of Israelis consider themselves secular and some of them are openly opposed to Jewish orthodoxy, the secular Israeli is constantly confronted by the dilemmas that the Jewish character of the state imposes on them: no public transport during Shabbat, the improbable possibility of finding pork in Jerusalem and the cost of a civil wedding in Cyprus.[10]

All my participants celebrated at least the main religious holidays and most of them had a Shabbat dinner or lunch with their families and saw this as a special occasion. According to the latest survey conducted by the Israeli Democracy Institute in 2009, 90% of the Jewish citizens of Israel celebrate Passover and two thirds of Israeli Jews keep kosher, although only half of them use separate dishes for dairy and meat products. More than half of Israeli Jews define themselves primarily as Jews and 80% think it is very important to be married by a Rabbi. Nonetheless, 46% considered themselves secular.[11]

So, when my participants define themselves they not only say they are *hiloni* (secular), they say Jewish secular. Being a secular Jew in Israel does not mean being anti-religious or unfamiliar with Jewish values and celebrations. Neither does it mean being indifferent to Jewish heritage. A secular Jew is then "one who, at least in some aspects of his life …makes decisions independently of halakha or rabbinic decisions."[i] In the words of my participants, it simply means not acting as a Jewish Orthodox.

But it is not only the state that imposes this identity dichotomy. All my secular participants moved constantly between a religious and a secular world, distinguishing between them clearly in their speech, but not so much in their everyday lives. While some of them talked to me constantly about being secular, they simultaneously kept kosher kitchens, a marker of national and cultural identity, but not necessarily religious identity. The contradictions between their speech and their behaviour mirror the contradictions of a state that emphasises its Jewish religious character while simultaneously promoting a secular

[10] See Arian Asher y Keissar-Sugarme Ayala 2012. *A Portrait of Israeli Jews, Believes, Observance and values of Israeli Jews 2009*. Jerusalem: The Israeli Democracy Institute.
[11] *Loc. cit.*

identity.For secular Jews, the struggle to re-signify kosher laws in the modern world is constant, especially in Israel where the risk of assimilation is perceived nowadays as non-existent. According to Ofra Tene "Hebrew identity does not require kashrut observance in order to remain distinct from the non-Jewish surrounding. There was no real threat to the collective Hebrew identity because assimilation with the local culture was not perceived as an attractive alternative. Hebrewness offered an identity associated with the powerful group: a new experience for them"[12]. However, kosher laws are still fundamental for Israelis, either because they keep them or because they oppose them, and they still are a symbol of Jewishness, a fundamental characteristic of their national identity. However, Jewish immigrants from the ex-Soviet Union do not perceive kosher laws as a fundamental characteristic of the Israeli identity and continue eating pork to manifest their singularity among the rest of communities of Israel. [13]

Should Israeli food be kosher?

The debate about religious laws in Israel, including kosher laws, started before the State of Israel was established. The place of kashrut was determined by a letter written in 1947 by David Ben-Gurion, the chairman of the Jewish Agency and after the first Prime Minister of Israel, to the ultra-orthodox authorities of the organization of *Agudat Israel*. The Jewish Agency was afraid that the ultra-orthodox community would not give their support to the new state. Tom Segev affirms that the "[Ultra-orthodox Rabbis] viewed Zionism as heresy, feared that it endangered the Jews, and estimated that it was liable to challenge their position as the primary communal leaders".[14]

In order to win their support for the establishment of the new state of Israel, Ben-Gurion promised to respect the religious laws and the religious authority in four aspects of the life of the state:

a) The Sabbath would be the official day of rest.
b) Kosher laws would be observed in state institutions and in the Israeli Defence Force.

[12] Ofra Tene. 2015. "The New Immigrant Must Not Only Learn He Most Also Forget" in Anat Helmand ed. *Jews and their Foodways* New York: Oxford University Press. [kindle edition} loc. 4451.
[13] See Anna Shternshis. *op. cit.*
[14] Tom Segev, 2002. *Elvis in Jerusalem: Post Zionism and the Americanization of Israel.*Trans. Haim Watzman. New York: Metropolitan Books. p.17.

c) Personal status and marriage would be governed by Jewish laws.

d) The autonomy of religious education would be guaranteed. [15]

This letter, known as the *status quo*, aimed to guarantee the ultra-orthodox Rabbis that their authority would be respected even in a secular Jewish state, and that the Jewish identity would be preserved.[16] To date, the *status quo* constitutes the basis for the relationship between Israel and the religious authorities in Israel. From this agreement hundreds of juridical decisions were derived that have ruled the complex set of arrangements that accommodate religious authorities and their role in the Jewish state. Nowadays it is considered that this document should not be the only legal source for the regulation of religion in Israel, but it is still fundamental as it encapsulates "the spirit" that must be followed.[17] At the time of its creation, it worked as a conflict neutralizer, and allowed for cooperation among different Jewish groups; a cooperation that was needed to create the state. [18] According to Daphne Barak-Erez, the *status quo* was the culmination of the political cooperation of the Labour Party and the religious parties that served as its political allies, mainly the National Religious Party".[19]

The *status quo* is a source of constant disagreement between secular and religious Israelis and authorities. However, it is still respected in many aspects of Israeli life, especially due to the lack of a constitution, a fact that also reflects the impossibility of agreeing on the issue of religion in the state.[20] Other provisions related to the Jewish character of the state have been promulgated since 1947 including laws regulating kashrut. For example, in 1948 The Kasher Food for Soldiers Ordinance was promulgated ensuring that kosher food would be supplied to Jewish soldiers in the army.[21] Administrative arrangements have also been made through time such as the policy to serve only kosher food in government institutions.[22]

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[15] Yedida Z. Stern 2017. Religion, State and the Jewish identity crisis in Israel. Washington D.C: Brookings Institute.p.8.

[16] Tom Segev, *op. cit,* p.19.

[17] Daphne Barak-Erez. 2009. *Law and Religion under the Status Quo Model: Between Past Compromises and Constant Change,* 30 Cardozo L.Rev. p.2496.

[18] Omri Shamir and Guy Ben-Porat, 2007. "Boycotting for Sabbath: religious consumerism as a political strategy", Contemporary Politics 13:1. p.77.

[19] *Ibid.* p.2498

[20] Nathan Lerner "Religion and the Secular State of Israel" in Donlu D. Thayer [editor] *Religion and the Secular State: National Reports.* 2017. Madrid: Universidad Complutense Madrid. p.423.

[21] Daphne Barak-Erez. *Op. cit.,* p.2499

[22] *Loc. cit.*

The political changes of the country have also affected the regulation of kosher in Israel. The privatization of the meat industry and the termination of the state control over it allowed the import of non-kosher meat and the high rates of Soviet Jewish immigrants that consume pork popularized the establishment of non-kosher supermarkets. In 1986, the Festival of Matzot (Prohibition of Leaven) Law was approved stipulating that business owners should not display leavened products during Passover.[23] Paradoxically, while the religious parties were winning popularity, the changes in consumerism culture, as well as secularization and migration meant that this law was not enforced.[24]

As mentioned previously, during the past three decades Israel has turned into "a western-type affluent society, with more hedonistic values, open to foreign cultural influences and deeply engaged in consumption".[25] This has meant that although the status quo is still in place, the debate surrounding its application has become more aggressive, particularly with issues related to Shabbat and kosher laws.

One of the latest controversies surrounding kosher laws took place in June 2015, when a soldier, originally from the United States, ate a non-kosher sausage in a military base in Israel. The sausage had been given to him by his grandmother during a weekend visit to her kibbutz, and although soldiers can bring food from home, non-kosher food is not permitted in the base. The soldier was penalized by the authorities in the army although they had different opinions about the case and after some debate and the outrage in Israeli public opinion, his punishment was reduced.[26] The American soldier case showed that the Israeli authorities perceived Jewishness as manifest in practice by following kosher laws as a key feature of the public image of the country. However, individuals, not only ordinary people but even the generals in the army, had different opinions about the situation.

Although it is true that Israeli institutions continue serving kosher food, it does not mean that the population follows, or that restaurants or supermarkets do not sell non-kosher products. Some of my more religious classmates in the Ulpan in the University of Haifa had a hard time finding kosher food that was to the standards they were used to in their countries of origin. "You would believe is easy to find good, tasty kosher food in Tel Aviv right? The first

[23] *Ibid.*p.2501.
[24] Omri Shamir and Guy Ben-Porat, *Ibid*. p.83
[25] *Ibid.* p.77.
[26] Alex Swerdloff. 2015. "Why One Israeli Soldier Paid the Price for Going 'Whole Hog', *Munchies,* Accessed July 5, 2017. www.munchies.vice.com.

Jewish city in the world, but, well it's not" they said constantly. Although I was able to find kosher food everywhere I went it is true that Israeli food is not necessarily kosher, and everyday there are more non-kosher options. According to Yael Raviv, only 25% of restaurants in Israel are kosher.[27] This is directly related to the Russian immigration of the nineties. Russian Jews saw the consumption of pork as a way to preserve their own collective identity, a Jewish identity that they see as unique and different to the European one and the Mizrahi one.[28] Russian shops became popular not only within their community but with Israelis in general that did not want to keep kosher. For example, *Tiv'Taam* is a popular non-kosher supermarket that can be found in many cities in Israel and is one of the most popular non-kosher shops in the country. Not only does it sell European style cold meats, but it also opens on Saturday, making it attractive for most of the secular population of Israel, as well as tourists.

The debate around kosher laws also reflects different stands and opinions about the main characteristics of Israeli food. Some of my participants believed that Israeli food had to be kosher, as it was a fundamental symbol of the Jewish state. Others did not agree. Although keeping kosher seems to be, for most of my participants, a symbol of Judaism and of Israeliness, most of them believed that Israeli food does not need to be kosher. Some of them even stated that "new Israeli cuisine" had to be non-kosher. Josef, a culinary writer also mentioned in previous chapters, explained:

> Pork and seafood - that is new Israeli cuisine! Russian immigration brought a lot of pork culture, but even before, Romanians ate pork in Israel. However, it was in the 90s that the Russians arrived and opened delis. It is in those shops, that look really posh and elegant, that you can find pork, ham, bacon, and sausages. Of course, I´m talking of Tel Aviv, maybe Haifa but in Jerusalem, it is harder to get pork. Kosher is not necessarily a characteristic of Israeli cuisine, but it is a style. Like *him*[29], back in the day's people cooked like that, and it is tasty and good. However, I hate kosher; I have an allergy to it, they [the Rabbis] rule over our private life for money, they decide how we get married and how and what we can eat. But yes, the lack of pork is a characteristic of our cuisine. Turkish cuisine apart from yogurt with

[27] Yael Raviv. 2015. *Falafel Nation*. Lincoln-London: University of Nebraska Press. p.166.

[28] Anna Shternshis. 2015, *op. cit.* loc.448.

[29] Traditional Ashkenazi Shabbat stew made with meat, vegetables and legumes and cooked overnight on a slow fire (nowadays in a slow cooker).

> meat is almost kosher. But nobody cares if *shakshuka* is kosher or not." Thankfully there are restaurants that don't cooperate with the Rabbinate, so there is an initiative called "communal kosher" that tries to make people trust each other and give community kosher certificates. Even Jewish restaurants are leaving kosher behind. You have places like Rafael in Tel Aviv that serves Moroccan food that is not kosher. The chef there says his grandmother was his main influence. However, his egg pasta is served with shrimps or sashimi. And his couscous is by far the best in Israel. His couscous is the best simply because it is not kosher as it has butter. Clearly, his grandmother would not be happy with his cooking.

Josef is highlighting not only his preference for non-kosher food but the political problems he thinks it causes. He is especially bothered by the idea of authorities controlling his body and personal life and by breaking kosher laws he resists them. Josef is an Ashkenazi Jew, proud of European Jewish traditions, especially culinary ones. However, he feels the official kosher certification given by the Rabbis in Israel and the religious institutions of the government do not have a legitimate place in a modern democratic state. Presently, only the Chief Rabbinate of Israel is authorized to certify a business as kashrut. In the last couple of months, this mandate has been supported by a ruling from the High Court of Justice that rejected more liberal interpretations that allowed alternative bodies to give this certification.[30] In particular, there is one grassroots initiative, known as *Hashgacha Pratit* and initiated by the orthodox Rabbi Aaron Leibowitz that has the aim of giving kosher business options to certificate their kitchens. The initiative has become popular among restaurateurs in Jerusalem that want to continue with tradition but are not supportive of the power and practices the Rabbinate has.[31] On his fund-raising page, the project states: "There is a multi-level breakdown in the state of kashrut supervision by the Rabbinate. There is a lack of oversight by the supervisors, many rumours of back door deals, and a general adversarial environment between the business establishments and the governmental agency. Many restaurants feel they are not receiving the attention they deserve and that they are subject

[30] Yair Ettinger. 2016. "High Court: Only Chief Rabbinate Can Pronounce Businesses Kosher", *Haaretz,* Accessed July 4, 2016, www.haaretz.com.

[31] Rabbi Aaron Leibowitz, *Hashgacha Pratit,* Accessed June 30, 2017 https://www.headstart.co.il/project.aspx?id=11395&lan=en-US.

to misused authority and unethical behaviour. This leads many of them to wonder if the Rabbinate's supervision is worth it at all."[32]

Josef was a supporter of this project as he deeply opposes the idea of the Rabbinate determining what is fine for him to eat and what is not. Although the project is not against the supervision of a Rabbi, it does report corruption and stands against it. Josef finds the idea of community supervision much less threatening than the idea of high-rank Rabbis determining what is edible for him and what is not. Josef does not understand kosher cooking as a religious law but a cooking style that is part of Israeli culture, but that does not have to be the only one. As mentioned, he does not keep kosher, but he does this not only because he believes it important for his job as a food consultant to be able to eat anything; but because he thinks of it as a way to resist the regulations the State imposes on his private life. However, he sees kosher as part of his identity as a Jew; his opposition to kosher food has to do with opposing the Rabbinical control over governmental institutions and his own body and to what he sees as a clear and unjustified intervention of the state and the religious authorities in his private matters.

The struggles about kosher laws in Israel are only a reflection of the unresolved conflicts over the place of religion and religious authority in a secular state. Until now, these battles have been settled with political negotiation and, as Tom Segev points out, the common Jewish cultural elements that Israelis share have prevented a complete break between both poles of Israeli society.[33] Nonetheless, some Israelis use different tactics, like breaking kosher laws to discretely manifest their disagreement with this or other policies of the state.

Breaking kosher as a political decision

Esther and Josef were not the only Israelis that constantly transgressed kosher laws and some of them did it as a symbol of unconformity with the religious status quo of the country. Einat for example, mentioned in the previous chapter, has chosen to follow a vegetarian diet, mainly vegan, so even when she does not care about them, she is not breaking kosher laws. She thinks her way of eating is ethical and peaceful. It was not uncommon for me to encounter

[32] *Loc. cit.*
[33] Tom Segev. *op. cit.* p.89.

vegetarian and vegan participants that felt that their diets were closer to the precepts encoded in the Torah than those followed by orthodox. Einat told me that for her:

> It is more important to buy free range eggs than kosher meat. You should see how they treat chickens in this country, it is outrageous. The idea behind kosher laws was not only to guarantee the health of the people crossing the desert but to have an ethical approach to eating, to avoid animal suffering, to have a sustainable diet in the desert. Nowadays we can do much more than our ancestors, it is easier as we have more options, so instead of following kosher laws as they are written, we need to understand that these laws are about healthy eating and not cruelty towards animals. In a society like ours (Israeli society) which is so violent it is also important to choose more peaceful ways to feed ourselves. Maybe that will help us to sleep a little bit better.

Einat is characterizing her society as a violent one, and although she laughed and did not answer me when I ask her what she meant by it, I could deduce she was not only talking about chickens but about the conflict with the Palestinians. The relationship between eating choices and violence was also mentioned in another context by Maya, a food consultant in her thirties, who believed that Israelis do not drink a lot of alcoholic drinks as it makes them more violent… "and why would you want to get more violent if everything around you already is? That is why people prefer smoking pot over drinking alcohol because it calms you down". Einat's reasoning for being vegetarian was the same than Maya's; choosing a diet that made them feel better about the country's situation and the government's policy. Einat did not feel that following kosher law said a lot about who she was, instead, choosing a vegetarian diet did give her the possibility of expressing her political views, and she thought this ethical approach to eating made her more connected to her Jewish roots than keeping kosher.

Eliana, an American young woman that made *aliyah* (emigrated) to Israel 5 years ago was also constantly challenging the dietary restrictions she felt were imposed on her in her new country. When Eliana arrived in Israel, she moved to Beersheba, in the south of Israel. She now works for the municipality of the city as a social worker, and she is in charge of helping new immigrants from Anglo-Saxon countries to assimilate to Israel. The program she runs depends not only on the city's government but also on the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration. The ministry is responsible for the absorption and integration of new immigrants

to the community[34]. Eliana has a mixed background, her mother is Jewish, and her father only converted to Judaism on his 50th birthday. As a teenager, Eliana decided to become "religious" and she started keeping kosher. "I was an insufferable teenager; I made my parent's life really difficult. I was obsessed with Israel and Judaism, I kept kosher, dressed "modestly" and did not work on Shabbat. My parents did not know what to do with me. I remember I did not want to eat the food my mother prepared for me as it was not kosher. When I moved to Israel, everything changed." During the five years Eliana has lived in Israel, she has completely altered her diet. Firstly, she is convinced her diet is healthier now as she consumes vegetables and fruits as well as fresh cheeses, a habit she did not used to have. She attributes this to the quality of the fresh ingredients in Israel, but also to the common practice of eating salads at each meal, including breakfast. The praise she gives to the Israeli fruit, vegetables, and dairy products are also a sign of her Zionism. By choosing to mention these ingredients as new additions to her diet and by specifically saying this is something she started doing in Israel she is favouring Israeli agriculture over American, and reproducing one of the foundation myths of the state: the agricultural miracle, the blooming of the desert by Jewish hands.

However, although she frequently spoke about her new healthy, fresh diet, she does not cook a lot at home, she works long hours and also studies full-time, so she does not have time to cook. Almost all the food she eats is cooked by her Iranian mother-in-law. Each Shabbat, after dinner, her mother-in-law will pack the leftovers for her as well as dishes she cooked for them during the week. However, on the occasions Eliana does cook or shop, she never chooses kosher food. "It is my way of rebelling, at least a little bit. My boyfriend is also like me, he kept kosher for some time, and then he decided to stop. Yes, we are Jews, but we do not agree with the way this country handles things, especially when we talk about their relationship with orthodoxy. I don't need father government to tell me what can I eat and what I can't. Less so an old Rabbi that judges me for the way I look or speak. This country should not be run by religious authorities. Things would be better if religion was not in the middle of everything, we would have fewer problems among us. Don't get me wrong; I'm a Zionist, I love this country but I´m now Israeli, so I have the right to complain".

[34] Ministry of Immigration, http://www.moia.gov.il/English/Subjects/ImmigrantAbsorption/Pages/default.aspx accessed 2 July 2017.

Eliana's food choices are a symbol of her political position. On the one hand, she avoids eating kosher food as a way to complain against the religious institutions of the country. On the other, she chooses to eat fresh Israeli products, a symbol of the Jewish connection to the Land of Israel and the national story of agricultural success. However, the first time she decided to break kosher laws she was not trying to make a political point but to remember her childhood back in the United States. She was cooking chicken schnitzels, one of the more common Israeli dishes, and she remembered her mother used to serve them with mashed potatoes. "I could not stop thinking about my mother's mashed potatoes. She, of course, cooks them with butter, so I decided I had to do it. I remember that first bite of chicken and mashed potatoes. It was heaven; I was in my mother´s kitchen again. And after that, I could not stop, and from mixing meat and dairy I moved to pork, I love bacon, who doesn´t?"

Eliana´s food choices are not only politically motivated but are also the result of longing and nostalgia. By not keeping kosher she shows her discomfort with the relationship between the state and the religious authorities and their control over her choices, and simultaneously she manifests her mixed identity and the culinary traditions she grew up with.

Breaking kosher laws for Eliana is what Michel de Certau defines as a tactic, a "weapon of the weak"[35], a way of playing, and resisting the system in which she lives and, in some instances, disagrees with. De Certau defines tactics as: "a calculus which cannot count on a proper (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance".[36]

As a woman who grew up in a household where keeping kosher was not part of everyday life, Eliana's family memories are not tied to this aspect of Jewish life. It was not until she was a teenager that she adopted them, as a way to mark her decision to make her Jewish identity more salient, but also as a way to rebel against her parent's control, that saw this new diet as a teenage tantrum. Eliana then used kosher laws first to affirm her Jewish identity and mark a break from her parents and then to affirm her Israeli identity and rebel against authorities. In both cases, her food choices are a way to reaffirm who she is and which

[35] Michel de Certau. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life.* Trans. Steven F. Rendall. University of California Press: London. p. xix.
[36] *Ibid.* p.36.

element of her identity she wants to highlight at a certain moment of her life. Nowadays, as somebody that has an Israeli passport and lives in Israel she feels "fully Jewish," and therefore she does not feel any need to reaffirm this part of her identity through her food choices.

New immigrants that had kept kosher before as a way to affirm their Jewish identity did not feel the need to continue doing this when they moved to Israel. Being Israeli implied they were accepted as Jewish, so, therefore, they did not need to highlight their religious identity, their national one proved enough. Other new immigrants that ate pork and seafood growing up and who came from families that did not keep kosher also explained their decision as a political one, or as an understanding that their Jewishness is not related to religious laws.

Food choices are not only a medium of expressing individual identity and agency but also a technique to show connections with a collective.[37] New immigrants with mixed backgrounds have a particularly problematic bond with their Jewish and Israeli identity. In most cases, they felt they had to perform their Jewishness in order to be accepted. For some of them, becoming Israeli meant they no longer had the need to highlight any religious connection with the community; in other words, their nationality proved their connection. For these immigrants, food choices gave them a symbolic framework to express the complexity of their identity. The way they explain these food choices and the changes they make in their diets are a reflection of the way the process of identification varies according to the context and place in which they live.

Eliana and Esther understand and live kosher laws differently. Eliana breaks kosher laws as a way of resisting the status quo which she sees as violent and discriminatory against those who are not Orthodox Jews. She feels she is free to do it and has the right to because she feels her national identity allows her not only to complain but to break with Jewish tradition. On the other hand, Esther cooks kosher food to keep her family traditions alive and to reinforce Jewishness. Nonetheless, she breaks them as a "redemptive moment" as a way of manifesting her personality and unwillingness to follow religious precepts in every aspect of her life.

[37] Andrew Buckser, *op. cit.* p.192.

Keeping kosher outside of Israel

Most of my *haloni* participants had mixed feelings about keeping kosher. Although some of them admitted they did not keep kosher, when sharing a meal with them in the privacy of their homes or in a restaurant they almost always followed kosher rules. Most of the time, they wanted to project an image of modernity, and they felt that by saying they did not keep kosher they could achieve this. During my fieldwork, I found several people that invited me to meals where dairy products and meat were mixed but I was never served pork or shellfish. It was also common to find that the members of one family had different approaches to kosher food, so all of the attitudes towards kosher had to be taken into account when choosing the menu. For Ayala Grossman, the best solution was to avoid pork in her house as half of the family would eat it and half would not: "My husband and Hannah, my daughter, will never eat pork, don´t ask me why they will mix dairy and meat and happily eat shrimps, but they would never eat pork. Why don't they eat pork? I guess it is a symbol of belonging, something that reminds them they are Jewish." However, Hannah´s husband disagreed with his mother-in-law, and explained to me that Hannah does eat pork if he orders it in a restaurant, as long as they call it "veal" between themselves. As mentioned before, Israelis have re-signified kosher laws and adjusted them to their lifestyles. Some of them will vary their views according to the place where they are, others to the company they have and others to the way they feel at that moment. Hava, who had lived several years outside of Israel, saw keeping kosher as a manifestation of her Jewishness and her commitment to the Zionist cause. She did not consider herself religious, and she described herself as a left-wing Zionist. Her ancestors were Holocaust survivors, and she felt that avoiding eating pork was simply a way to show her connection to those ancestors and to the country that had saved them. She was respectful of tradition, although she felt that the power religious authorities had over her food choices had no place in a secular country like hers. However, her husband Yossi did not keep kosher so when on holidays it was particularly difficult for her to avoid pork and she therefore simply called it veal.

Ariel, a graphic designer in his thirties, also changes his diet depending on where he is and who he is with. Ariel follows a mainly kosher diet especially since he moved in with his sister who is more religious than him. Although Ariel will mix dairy products with meat when he is on holiday abroad, in Tel Aviv, he tends to follow all kosher rules, even if they are

impractical or nobody else at the table is doing it. He and a group of his friends, including his sister, invited me out one day while I was in Tel Aviv. They decided to go to an Irish pub, as they wanted to show me that it was possible to eat something other than kebabs in Israel. They had never been to that pub before, and they did not know that most of the dishes on the menu included bacon or ham. After 15 minutes of looking at it, they decided to go somewhere else. None of them pointed out that they had chosen to leave because the place was not kosher, they simply stated that there was nothing there they wanted to eat.

A few days later I asked Ariel about the incident: "well yes, the place was not kosher, but that was not the problem. We just don´t like pork, so the smell of the place was unpleasant for most of us. Kosher does not have to do with religion, it is cultural, and it has to do with who we are. I keep kosher because my grandparents did, it is part of being Israeli, and keeping kosher here is extremely easy. That is why when I go to Europe or the United States I mix dairy and meat, I don´t want to make anybody uncomfortable or to give my hosts a hard time, so I eat everything except pork and seafood. When I´m back home, I know everything is kosher, and that nobody is uncomfortable if I follow the rules here, so it is easy to keep them, and it's a part of my family's traditions".

Ariel feels that keeping kosher is a key marker of his identity, not necessarily religious but national. However, his attitude towards food can be ambivalent. While living outside of Israel, Ariel manifested his national identity by going to synagogue and practicing Judaism as a religion, the same way that Einat in chapter four did while living in the UK. She avoided eating pork, but he will mix dairy and meat to avoid problems, especially with his roommate. However, in Israel, although he never goes to a synagogue, keeps Shabbat or participates in any event within the orthodox community, he does have a strictly kosher diet. In the same way as Eliana and Einat did, while living outside of Israel Ariel expressed his national identity by becoming closer to his Jewish, religious identity. Nevertheless, he needed to integrate into a community where he was the only non-Christian, so he felt that keeping kosher might become an obstacle. Back in Israel, he returned to his old behaviour and started to eat kosher again while at the same time he stopped attending religious services and did not get closer to any orthodox group.

Ariel's way of keeping kosher is frequent, especially between Israelis that have lived outside of Israel for some periods of their life. Depending on the context he is in, he will choose how to express his national identity. He feels that keeping kosher while living among

people that do not is unrealistic if he doesn't want to be isolated because he is not religious and sees it only as a tradition, he is able to leave it aside, although he will not eat pork as he doesn't like the smell of it. However, because one of the main features of his national identity is Judaism, and in the diaspora the elements of this identity have not been nationalized, the only way he has to express it is through attending services in the synagogue. The ambiguity of the Jewish element of the Israeli identity is evident in Ariel's life, in that he must adopt religious behaviours that he considers practical in order to manifest his national identity.

New adopted identities

But keeping kosher is not only something that is policed and imposed by the government, for a lot of Israelis, it is a life choice, and finding kosher food available everywhere is one of the benefits of living in the Jewish state and a fundamental characteristic of the country. Noa Friedman, for example, has a completely different point of view about kosher to her mother Esther or her sister. For her, it is a matter of religion and not only of tradition, although it is also a way of keeping her husband's family happy. Noa got married more than two decades ago to a Jewish Tunisian man and lives with her family in Jerusalem. She invited me to cook with her and to spend a Shabbat dinner with her family. She wanted me to learn how a religious Shabbat is celebrated and to appreciate the differences between her celebration and her sister's one. She decided to cook Tunisian dishes (fish in tomatoes and pepper sauce, chicken with olives and vegetables, salads made with chickpeas and traditional Tunisian sweets) although she did point out that she sometimes cooks with an "Asian" twist.

When I arrived at Noa´s house on Friday morning to cook with her, she had already started preparing the chickpeas for the stews and grilling some peppers. She offered me and her sister an instant coffee, and before we started to cook, she showed me around her kitchen and explained some kosher rules. We then started to cook. Noa´s cooking is labour-intensive, and although there were four of us, it took more than five hours to cook everything. She was also making food for the next day as cooking is not allowed during Shabbat. Noa does not cook Ashkenazi food as her husband does not like it, so she had adopted her mother-in-law's recipes: "I´m a good cook, I was even before I was married, but this is completely different to what I used to eat when I was growing up. I had to learn from cookbooks and sometimes my mother-in-law gives me recipes, but it is not easy to follow them". She showed me her cookbooks full of notes made by her or her mother-in-law. Her sister was bothered by our

conversation as she did not approve of Noa's lifestyle, not only her complete assimilation to Jewish Tunisian culture but she also disliked Noa's observance of religious traditions. "Look," she told me "Noa is only religious when her husband is around, when we go on holidays without him, she stops this nonsense and starts eating cheeseburgers again. The minute we return she becomes religious again, it does not make any sense to me but you know, Oriental Jews are like that, backwards".

Noa´s sister constantly confronted her about not being able to spend Passover together so Noa accepted an invitation for a family meal at her house as long as everything was kosher and she could bring some food. Afterwards, she told me she did not see the importance of kosher laws but following them kept her husband happy. "He comes from a really religious family; he believes these things are important, and I decided to follow them for him. But sometimes it is really difficult, and men do not notice because they are not in charge of the house. For example, a few months ago we invited some friends for Friday dinner. Before Shabbat started, I prepared everything and put a chicken in the oven on a low heat. Less than an hour before the dinner I noticed that I had forgotten to turn on the oven. Shabbat had started, and it is forbidden to turn the oven on so I had to make a decision. When my husband went to pray, I turned the oven on, so he never realized I had broken the rules. If I hadn´t done it, we would not have been able to eat! He never found out that Esther and I´m sure God does not care if I turn on the oven on a Friday afternoon".

Noa´s cooking was determined by the taste and preferences of her husband and her children. Not only did she follow all the kosher laws even when she was unable to see the meaning or relevance of some of them, but she also had decided to cook only dishes that pleased her family. For example, although she disliked fish and coriander she used both ingredients in the dinner she was cooking that day. All of her mother's family avoid coriander, but Tunisian cooking uses it constantly, so Noa does it too. However, she did "cheat sometimes" and included some Ashkenazi ingredients in her food. For example, Noa prepares every weekend *Adafina,* a Sephardic Sabbath stew typical in Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and central Morroco.[38] The basic recipe of Adafina includes meat, onions, a pulse (chickpeas or white beans), vegetables like turnips and potatoes and is enriched with a calf's foot or a tongue.[39]

[38] Gil Marks. 2010. *Encyclopaedia of Jewish Food*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc: New Jersey, p.2.
[39] *Loc. Cit.*

But Noa has decided that instead of adding tongue, she sometimes adds *kishke* (lamb or beef intestines stuffed with meat, fat and sometimes pulses). “I add *kishke* to the stew because I like it. I know I shouldn´t, and my husband´s family does not like it, but normally they don´t notice, and I really enjoy it”.

When we had finished cooking for dinner, Noa invited me to stay for lunch with her and her husband as well as her sister. She served a simple stew made with chickpeas, peppers, and tomatoes. After her husband tasted the stew, he said to me: “You need to know Noa is a good cook but she is not really traditional. She will never be able to cook this stew the way my mother does. She has tried to explain to her how to do it properly, but she does not get it. You know you need to peel the chickpeas one by one so it really takes the correct texture, but Noa does not do it”. Noa immediately answered: “Well, right now you have your mother to do it like that for you, maybe when she dies I´ll start.” The criticism made of Noa by her husband can be explained by looking at the hierarchical structure of the Israeli family. As mentioned in the previous chapter, older women are in charge of transmitting tradition, so Noa’s mother-in-law is seen as the woman in charge of it, while Noa does not have the authority to do so. Nonetheless, Noa is not willing to let the comment go and replied by acknowledging that one day she will be in charge and then things will be done as she likes. Noa has adopted most of her family-in-law’s traditions and has left her own upbringing in the past. From a secular background, now Noa lives is a religious house where food preparation is not only her housewife duty, but her religious duty. While her husband prays in a synagogue, she cooks for Shabbat, cleans the house and prepares everything for the rest day. She has to be sure absolutely everything her family eats is kosher. By by cooking and keeping a kosher house, Noa does not only please her family but also God. Simultaneously, she is also separating herself from the secular Jewish world where she grew up. Although her sister world is also Jewish, Noa´s understanding of her Jewish identity is different from hers and how she follows kosher laws also sets her apart from them.

Conclusion

The history of the food culture in Israel mimics the story of the country and the tensions in it. The first Jewish pioneers try to construct a new nation based on a socialist non-religious ideology. However, in order to be able to establish it, they had to make agreements with orthodox movements and had to build a state where religious identity was still at the heart of it. As analysed in Chapter 4, Zionists gave religious symbols a new nationalistic meaning,

but even when the State had the aim of being secular, as long as it characterized itself as a Jewish state it had to give control and power to religious authorities. Kosher laws, the celebration of religious holidays, the control of the Rabbinate over who can claim citizenship and who can't as well as over personal matters like marriage and divorce are just some examples of how religious authorities hold power over the citizens of Israel.

In this chapter, I have argued that keeping kosher in Israel does not necessarily speak of the religious commitment of a person but of the way he relates to his cultural and national identity. The *status quo* was not only a necessary agreement for the establishment of the state but it also reflected the identification of the secular with some aspects of Jewish traditions, and their willingness to preserve these traits in the new state.[40] Nonetheless, there has always been resistance from different groups in Israeli society to these agreements. Furthermore, the way the individual relates to kosher laws mirrors his position in relation to the control the Israeli authorities can have over consumption and the body of their citizens. I have argued through this chapter that kosher laws and the way that they are imposed by the authorities, are negotiated and resisted by ordinary people in their private life. This is a reflection of the dilemmas and ambiguities of the Israeli identity. While the public life of Israel is mainly kosher, in the privacy of their lives, individuals negotiate the way they keep these rules and the meanings they have for them.

Some of my secular participants like Esther, break kosher laws as a liberating act, "a redemptive moment" that allows them to oppose social conventions without actually breaking them. While others, like Ariel, believe following them is fundamental to the identity of the country. Josef believes kosher is a cooking style that is characteristic of Jewish cuisine but not necessarily of Israeli food culture. And although he is proud of his Jewish identity he is of the opinion that the kosher certification is a mechanism used by the State to intrude into the private matters of Israelis; as well as echoing the corruption of the religious establishment. Therefore, he avoids consuming kosher food, as a way of resisting this imposition.

For new immigrants like Eliana, keeping kosher outside Israel was a tool to avoid assimilation and to reaffirm her Jewish identity. Now as an Israeli, she does not feel any need to continue doing this, as her national identity and her connection with her new country

[40] Daphne Barak-Erez. *op. cit.,* p.2499.

validates in her eyes who she is. On the other hand, Esther, Ruth, and Noa keep kosher to please their families for religious or cultural reasons. However, in the privacy of their kitchens or eating outside, they will break this convention and find those redemptive moments that allow them to disrupt routine and rebel against the roles and traditions imposed on them.

Chapter 5. They tried to kill us; we survived let´s eat! Jewish celebrations in the Israeli household

It was a sunny spring morning in Tel Aviv when I visited Einats´ flat in the centre of Tel Aviv. Einat was a close friend of one of my informants, and when she heard about my research, she insisted she wanted to participate. Einat was in her late thirties and had two young children when I met her. She had just come back to Israel after spending four years in the UK while her husband finished his studies in dentistry. During her time living in the UK, she did not work, and she was happy to return to her life as a teacher in Israel.

She opened the door of her pristine flat and before saying hello she started laughing. I did not understand what was happening until she pointed out the package of sausages she had in her hand: "Oooh, I didn't think about this! You want to talk about Israeli food, and I´m holding some Argentinian pork sausages in my hand! I´m so sorry, my husband is the one that likes them, I´m vegetarian!" she said. Then, Einat went into the kitchen, left the sausages, and offered me an instant coffee and some fruit. Although I did not make any comment about the sausages, she continued apologizing and explaining why she had pork in the house. She mentioned a couple of times during our interview that her husband had acquired a taste for pork sausages while they were living in the UK a few years ago and an Argentinian friend of him had bought these ones for him.

Einat was either distressed by the fact that I had "caught her" with pork, or she was trying to make a point by holding them in her hand. Either way she constantly pointed out during our interview that neither she or her family kept kosher and that they did not see the point of it. She also explained to me that although she would be happy to have me anytime at her flat, she did not think it was a good idea to invite me to a Shabbat dinner as they did not celebrate it in any way and her food tended to be vegetarian. Einat did say they had family dinners every Friday night and that they tended to avoid the use of electronics during the dinner "as everybody does in Israel". Nonetheless, she repeated several times that she did not say any prayers for Shabbat or bless candles. She felt that this made her family less interesting for my research and that she could not help me as much as she would have wanted. "I grew up like this you know? My grandparents wanted to build a new life here, so they left in the past anything traditionally Jewish. My grandmother never passed on her

recipes, and I can't cook anything Ashkenazi, I just know the basics to feed my children. Schnitzel, chopped salad, roast potatoes those kinds of things. My husband's family is Moroccan; they do know how to cook, maybe you should go to them." Einat hinted during the interview that her ancestors were Holocaust survivors and she talked a little bit about her mother and her partner, but she avoided talking about the past and origins of her family as much as she could. They were Israelis, no need to point out where in Europe they had come from or in what circumstances.

Einat also did not felt comfortable labelling herself as Jewish, and she avoided the term as much as she could. Nonetheless, she h also mentioned that her lack of Jewish knowledge made her a less useful participant for my research: research that looked at Israeli food not Jewish food. However, it seemed that Einat —even when she avoided the topic— saw Jewishness as a fundamental part of Israeli identity. This was even more evident when suddenly she started talking about Passover and all the preparations she needed to start that same day in order to celebrate the holiday. She was organizing the dinner, and during the week she needed to go shopping and then cook for the dinner: chicken soup with matzah balls (dumplings), gefiltefish (fish patties), some vegetarian options for herself and a Moroccan chicken in honour of her mother-in-law. She was also planning to buy some traditional Moroccan sweets for desserts and looking for recipes for some extra side dishes. Einat was nervous; it was the first time she had cooked for her family-in-law, and she felt it was her responsibility to do it after living abroad for the past few years.

During the hours that I talked with her, Passover became the main topic of our discussion, and it was clear that she was extremely anxious about it. Her anxiety did not come from the apparent contradiction between her denial of her Jewish identity and her celebration of this religious holiday; but from having her family-in-law at her home. She saw Passover as a national celebration, and therefore as a fundamental part of who she was as an Israeli. Still, she made sure I knew it was not going to be a religious celebration, at least not for her. "You know my parents always celebrated Passover but put bread on the table[41]. I do the same, is a nice moment to be with the family but that is it. Although I have never spent a year without celebrating it, it is what we do in Israel you know? We celebrate Passover even if we are not religious".

[41] In the next section, I will explain in detail the dietary laws surrounding this holiday.

For Einat, Passover was a national holiday, and she kept on celebrating it while she and her family were living in London to teach her children who they were. "When you are in Israel these are national holidays. You don't need to go to a synagogue to celebrate Purim[42], you just dress up your children and go out to the streets. But in London is not like that. You have to buy a membership in a synagogue and go to services. If you want to be Israeli outside of Israeli, you need to be Jewish. Otherwise, there is nothing left except Yom Hazmaout (Independence Day). But liberal synagogues are also anti-Israel, so you have to go to a conservative place. Is really difficult."

Einat's experience made me think about the relationship between being Jewish and being Israeli. Although secular and reluctant to talk about her own Jewishness; she did not have a choice while she was living in London. Einat had not found another way to express her national identity outside her country other than by attending a synagogue and celebrating the holidays that she normally considered to be national, not religious. However, in Israel, she has never been to a synagogue except for weddings, and she and her husband married in Cyprus to avoid going through the religious ceremony.[43]

Einta's experience illustrates the way in which religious symbols can be nationalized and given a different meaning. With the aim of understanding this nationalization of symbols, in this chapter I explore different narratives focusing on the celebration of Passover in which Jewishness is emphasised as a main component of the Israeli national identity. I will question the importance given to Jewishness by different members of the society and how they negotiate its meaning. It is not my intention to elucidate the meaning of being Jewish, but the importance of feeling Jewish and being perceived as Jewish in belonging to the Israeli national community.

The first ethnographic narration I present describes how the celebration of Passover is used by Israeli institutions like the Ulpan (Hebrew schools) to transform new immigrants into Israelis and change their behaviour into one that is perceived as Israeli. As I will explain, this "culinary conversion" is not rejected by the students, on the contrary it is supported by

[42] Jewish holidays celebrated around February that commemorate the triumph of Queen Esther in Persia over her husband's advisor that wanted to eliminate the Jews. It is one of the happiest holidays of the Jewish calendar, known by some as the "Jewish carnival". Children and adults in Israel wear costumes.

[43] There is no civil marriage in Israel and the religious ceremony has to be conducted by an Orthodox Rabbi to be valid. However, civil marriages conducted in foreign countries are always recognized by the Israeli state. Therefore, Israeli couples that do not want to go through the scrutiny of a religious Orthodox Rabbi travel to Cyprus where a civil wedding is performed.

them as they perceived Jewishness as the gate to the nation. Eating Jewish food and learning how to celebrate holidays becomes a tactic used by non-Jewish immigrants in order to be seen as more national and to be accepted into the national community.

My second ethnographic vignette narrates an Israeli middle-class family Passover Seder, in which the celebration is once more used to socialise newcomers, in this case, children, into the Nation. Food is used to reinforce the belonging to the national community but also the core family values and their hierarchy. My third narrative shows how in the private sphere immigrants are re-socialized into the nation through meals, Jewish holidays, conversations and conviviality, and how the anxiety of Jewish immigrants to become part of the nation is almost non-existent in those who identify as Jews.

Through this chapter, I will sustain that Jewish religious symbols and traditions have been re-signified and nationalized in Israel and have become a marker of national identity and not necessarily of religious identity. Jewish celebrations are used to socialize the new members of the nation, making Jewishness central for Israeli identity. Food plays a fundamental role in this process of socialization and transformation, and eating certain dishes makes the diner part of the Jewish people and the Israeli nation. The centrality of the Jewish element in the Israeli identity, therefore, implies that those who want to be fully accepted by the majority of the nation need to at least adopt some of the elements of the Jewish identity as will be illustrated in this chapter.

What is Passover?

Passover is a fundamental Jewish holiday that has become one of the main national celebrations in Israel. The story of Passover, recovered in the Exodus, narrates how God helped the people of Israel to escape from slavery in Egypt. In its nationalized version, is the celebration of the liberation of the Jewish people from Egypt and therefore the birth of the nation. It's celebration highlights the historicity of the Jewish identity, as Connerton sustains "the core of the Jewish identity is established by reference to a sequence of historical events. Israel observes festival in order to remember, what is remembered is the historical narrative of a community. Passover and its explicitly historical Seder annually reminds practicing Jews

of the most formative moment in the life of their community, the moment in which that community was redeemed from bondage and made a free people."[44]

Passover commemorates the Exodus narrated in the Bible, the liberation of the Jewish people from their slavery in Egypt. It is observed, according to the Jewish calendar, on the 15th day of the month of Nissan (April) and its celebration implies a long list of rituals carried out mainly in the household. The Exodus instructs the Hebrews that "For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread," and also that "you must put leaven away from your houses." (Exodus 12:15). Coming as it does at the start of spring, Passover is also an agricultural holiday, marking the start of the barley harvest in Israel.

During the entire festival one refrains from eating bread, and by inference, any other foods that have the potential to ferment. This tradition recalls the haste with which the Israelites left Egypt, with not enough time to allow their bread to rise sufficiently. Before Passover, the house is cleaned from any leavened products (chametz), the silverware must be changed for the Passover set and all food that has been in contact with leavened products thrown away[45]. Although this cleaning is only common in orthodox families, most of my participants would do some kind of preparation for the holidays, although it might not involve throwing out leavened products. Einat, for example, does a "spring clean" before Passover, although it is a general cleaning of the house that does not imply getting rid of chametz.

But not only individuals do this cleaning, according to the Israeli Ministry of Tourism web page "the State of Israel, as a representative of the Jewish people, customarily sells all the chametz in Israel to a non-Jew at a symbolic price and buys it back immediately following the holiday."[46] The non-Jew is Jabar, an Israeli Muslim Arab resident of Abu Gosh, a small town close to Jerusalem, that has symbolically bought the chametz for the last 15 years. The performance of this ritual by the Israeli government implies that the idea of Israel as the "the homeland of all Jewish people" is taken literally, so the government, as the head of the "national household" transforms private rituals to the public sphere and nationalizes them.

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[44] Paul Connerton. 1989. *How Societies Remember.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.46.

[45] Reform Judaism. *Passover.* https://reformjudaism.org/jewish-holidays/passover-pesach [Accessed: May 15, 2016].

[46] Go Israel.2011. *Go Israel,*http://www.goisrael.com/Tourism_Eng/Tourist%20Information/Jewish%20Themes/Holidays/Pesach.aspx (Access: March 10, 2016).

The Passover cleaning is a ritual that can be followed in different ways. It can take the form of a "spring clean" like in the case of Einat, or it can be a thoroughly religious ritual. However, the way the cleaning is done is key for the observance of the holiday, and Orthodox Jews will not eat in houses or restaurants that have not followed the ritual according to Jewish law. For example, the Friedman family was unable to host their more religious relatives in their home, as they did not undertake an "orthodox" cleaning ritual. That meant that neither Esther, mentioned in previous chapters, or her daughter Ruth changed their plates and silverware for Passover and neither got rid of chametz or bread. This causes tensions and discussions between the family every year, as the family accuses the Mizrahi husband of one of the sisters to be the source of her newly-discovered religiosity. As a result, they cannot spend the holidays together.

After the cleaning, the main event is the "Passover Seder" that takes place on the first night of the holiday but can be repeated over the seven nights that the festival lasts. The script of the meal is contained in a book called the *Haggadah* ("the telling"), which dictates the evening's proceedings, which involve the consumption of food symbolising different aspects of the Exodus. The most famous part of the *Haggadah* is the Four Questions, which are usually sung by the youngest child at the Seder.[47] Taking their cue from the four different explanations of Pesach in the Torah, the sages suggested that each explanation could be paired with a particular type of questioner: the wise, the wicked, the simple and the one who doesn't know how to ask.

As part of the Seder, it is customary to include a Seder plate where food symbolising various stages of the Exodus is included. "All of them are meant to remind us of the primary theme of Passover: the Jewish people's transition from slavery to freedom."[48] The foods are the following:

The shank bone: (can be substituted with chicken wings): A piece of roasted meat represents the lamb that was the special Paschal sacrifice on the eve of the Exodus from Egypt, and annually, on the afternoon before Passover, in the Holy Temple.

[47] The four traditional questions are:
- On all other nights, we eat chameitz and matzah. Why on this night, only matzah?
- On all other nights, we eat all vegetables. Why, on this night, maror?
- On all other nights, we don't dip even once. Why on this night do we dip twice?
- On all other nights, we eat either sitting upright or reclining. Why on this night do we all recline?
Reform Judaism, *loc. cit.*

[48] Shoshana. Kordova. 2014. "What goes on a Seder Plate?" *Haaretz* accessed March 10, 2016. www.haaretz.com

The egg: A hard-boiled egg represents the holiday offering brought in the days of the Holy Temple. It is also related to the cycle of life.

The maror (bitter herbs): Bitter herbs are a reminder of the bitterness of the slavery in Egypt. Freshly grated horseradish (commonly mixed with beets in Israel), romaine lettuce, parsley, and endives are the most common choices.

Charoset: A mixture of apples, nuts, and wine which resembles the mortar and brick made by the Jews while in Egypt.

The *Karpas*: A non-bitter root vegetable alludes to the backbreaking work of the Jews as slaves. Boiled potatoes, parsley or onions are normally used. The use of red potatoes is encouraged by the Israeli Reform movement as a way to represent the immigration of Ethiopian Jews to Israel in 1991, a modern Exodus.[49]

The food on the plate does is not intended to please the palate of the diners but instead serves the purpose of symbolising the suffering of the Jewish people. The shank bone, for example, is not meant to be eaten but is only on the Seder plate to remind the diners of the love of God. By eating or observing the food in the Seder plate, the participants in the ritual not only are reminded of the history of the Exodus, but they embody it, eat it, and physically become part of the Jewish people.

Other symbolic acts include drinking four cups of wine that represent the four promises of redemption made by God in the Exodus: “I will take you out,” "I will save you…," "I will redeem you…,”"I will take you as a nation” (Ex. 6:6-7). This last promise is one of the reasons why it is possible to interpret this religious holiday in national terms, as it imagines the Jewish people as a national collective and not only as a religion.

A glass of wine is left untouched for the coming of the prophet Elijah. Ten drops of wine are spilled as a reminder of the ten plagues in Egypt. But the most important symbolic food of Passover is matzah, an unleavened bread that is eaten through the holiday as a reminder of the rush in which the Israelites had to leave Egypt.[50] It is customary to have three pieces stacked on the table of the Seder. Two are a reminder of the double portion of manna (food from heaven) the Israelites gathered before every day of rest in the desert (Exodus

[49] There are thousands of recipes for charoset. Ashkenazi recipes include apples and wine while Sephardi recipes include dates and nuts.

[50] It is believed that the Israelites had to leave Egypt so quickly that they did not had time for their bread to rise, therefore, flat, unleavened bread is used to commemorate this event.

16:11-22). The third piece of matzah, known as the *afikomen,* is broken at the beginning of the Seder and is hidden in the house, so at the end of the Seder the children of the family have to look for it, and presents are given to the one that finds it.

Passover is a structured long ritual that is followed in the houses of millions of Jewish families around the world, simultaneously. The awareness that at the same time thousands of families are eating and reciting the same prayers makes Passover a key holiday for the imagination of the nation.[51] Food is key for the celebration of this holiday, in which freedom, pain, and slavery are ingested. Passover uses food to reinforce the memory of certain events that are key for understanding the history of the Israeli nation. As I analyse in the next sections, it is not only the symbolism of the Seder plate that reminds the diner who he is, but the dishes of the Passover dinner also remind the diner of their nationality, as well as hierarchy and Jewishness.

The Passover dinner

A Passover Seder can take around three hours, and it's only an hour or more into the ritual that the dinner is eaten. Although most of the dishes outside the Seder plate do not have any connection or have any meaning related to the story of the Exodus, some of them like gefiltefish, matzo ball soup or chopped liver have become as important and traditional as the food items on the Seder plate. In 1962 Lillian Cornfeld, one of the most important cookbook writers of Israel suggested this menu for Passover in Israel:

Passover Menu for Seder Night [52]

Boiled carp with beet and horseradish relish

Chicken soup with knaidel (matzo ball soup)

Chicken or duck stuffed with apple stuffing or rice

Orange, avocado and lettuce salad

Baked small potatoes or matzah pudding

Fresh Fruit Salad

Sponge cake

[51] The importance of simultaneity is discussed by Benedict Anderson in his work *Imagined Communities,* 1983. London: Verso.

[52] Cornfeld, Lilian. 1962. *Israeli Cookery.* Tel Aviv: Private edition, p.236

She also provides a recipe for Israeli charoset were the apples are substituted with carrots, and orange juice is included. Oranges, carrots, and avocados have become fundamental in the Israeli diet, not only are they available most of the year but they are also a source of pride. Vegetables like these ones represent for Israelis the agricultural Jewish miracle in Palestine. The menu also includes a fresh fruit salad, well suited for the weather in Israel. Although Cornfeld's menu does reflect a willingness to create an original Israeli menu for the holiday she favours Ashkenazim traditions over Mizrahim dishes. The carp, matzah ball soup, and potatoes are typical dishes of the Ashkenazi holiday kitchen and their presence in the menu reminds us again of the Euroization of Israeli traditions that took place in the first decades of the life of the State.

Cornfeld's attempt to nationalize the Passover menu highlights the importance of introducing nationalist symbols (like oranges or avocados) to the Passover dinner; a fundamental holiday for the reinforcement of nationalist feelings in Israel. Anthony Smith affirms that the importance of this celebration resides in the centrality it gives to memory; a key aspect for the construction of collective identities "Collective memories and encoded memories are central to the Jewish experience and to the rise of Zionism. In the Jewish case, religion has been both the source and the vehicle of shared memories. Each diasporic community, for example, evolved its own customs and practices for Passover, but they operated within the framework of the commandments set down in the Bible and Talmud and within the basic format of the recital of the Seder set down in the Mishnah".[53] As Smith points out, Jewish religion has been used in Israel to reinforce collective memories. Passover is particularly useful as it is a celebration that highlights the national history. The Passover story can be interpreted as a narrative of liberation that highlights the connection between the Jewish People and the Land of Israel. The food traditions that surround it not only reminded the consumer of who he is, but help him to embody the suffering of the Exodus by eating the tears of the Jewish People (salted water) and the bitterness of slavery (bitter herbs). The diners become part of the Jewish history and Jewish history part of the self. Belonging to the nation is reinforced by constantly reminding the diners that they are part of the same people that once lived in slavery. The symbolism embedded in Passover is fundamental for the Israeli national identity as well as the Jewish identity, and therefore its celebration is not only

[53]Anthony D. Smith. 1995, "Zionism and Diaspora Nationalism", *Israel Affairs*, 2(2), p.6.

confined to the home but practiced in public spaces, especially in those ones where new members of the nation are being "absorbed".

Learning to celebrate Passover

When I started my fieldwork, I was particularly nervous about my language skills, so I immediately enrolled myself in an Ulpan, a Hebrew intensive school. Although most Israeli universities have an Ulpan for international students, the most popular ones among immigrants are those subsidized by the government and located in cities with an important flow of immigration. The Ulpan is a key institution in Israeli society, and a fundamental element of the absorption system of the country "In Israel absorption means foremost learning Hebrew. [In an Ulpan the immigrants] also study Jewish laws and customs previously unknown to them."[54] Although most of the students in a governmental Ulpan are Jewish immigrants, they are commonly treated as if they were unaware of the details of the Jewish calendar and tradition, and as the quote above states they are provided with knowledge that "the State believes is unknown to them. During my fieldwork, I attended one winter and one summer Ulpan in the University of Haifa, and I also joined a government Ulpan in Tel Aviv for three months.

Learning Hebrew in a University Ulpan is a different experience to learning it in a subsidized Ulpan.[55] The quality of teaching, commitment of the students and extra activities are superior in a University than in a subsidized Ulpan. Most students in the University are in Israel exclusively to learn Hebrew for one or two months so they can devote most of their time to this. The students of the Ulpan in Tel Aviv had families, worked or studied other things, meaning they had less time to study Hebrew.

The Ulpan in Tel Aviv was less than a quarter of the price of a University Ulpan even without the subsidy.[56] I was allocated to the advanced tourist course they offered in the afternoon. The course was divided into four sessions per week, each one lasting four hours. Contrary to what the name of the course suggested; most of the students in my class were

[54] Brian Weinstein. 1985. "Ethiopian Jews in Israel: Socialization and Re-Education" *The Journal of Negro Education* 54(2) p.215.

[55] Although it is possible for some students to be subsidized by the government even if they are taking Hebrew courses in a University.

[56] The government only subsidises the Ulpan classes for Jewish immigrants that have the intention of staying permanently in Israel.

not just tourist visiting Israel; they were non-Jewish Ukrainian, Russian and American women in their twenties that arrived with a "partner's visa" and were living in Israel. Some of them already had children with their partners and with the exception of a yoga instructor, they did not work outside of the house. Some of them wished to get married in Israel so they were considering converting to Judaism as orthodox conversion is the only way to get married in Israel to a Jewish partner. They perceived Jewishness as a key element of being Israeli, and the only one that will allow them to be fully national.

Most of the women attending classes were not too keen on learning Hebrew; they didn't see it as a priority as their partners were originally from their same country as them, as well as their friends. However, they thought of the Ulpan as a safe space where they could openly talk about their unfamiliarity with Israeli and Jewish traditions and a place in which they could learn how to behave like an Israeli. For the Ulpan´s teachers as well as for the administrative personnel it was clear that part of their jobs was not only to teach Hebrew but to help their students to assimilate to their new country. With this aim, the academic programme of the school included the celebration of Jewish holidays. As Deborah Golden points out in her study of Soviet immigrants to Israel "The Ulpan serves as an encounter between Israelis and newcomers, during which the latter are instructed in social knowledge crucial for their becoming proper members of Israeli society […] At the Ulpan, the emphasis is in learning to talk about political issues, on the one hand, and the temporal ordering provided by the national calendar on the other. These set out the two principles on which the Israeli state was founded: civic citizenship and ethnonational peoplehood."[57] Because most of the students in the tourist class were not Jewish, the teacher gave even more emphasis to the study of Jewish traditions, and she took extra time to explain things that she thought were completely unknown to her students. She saw them as good wives and mothers, something she thought was important for the country, and therefore she wanted to help them integrate to their families-in-law and to the country. Therefore, she not only talked about Jewish traditions, she also wanted to teach them how to talk about the nation, and which topics were allowed. Deborah Golden points out in her ethnography about Russian female immigrants in Israel, that most of the conversations between the teachers and the students in the Ulpan

[57] Deborah Golden.2001. "Now, like Real Israelis, Let´s Stand up and Sing: Teaching the Language to Russian New Comers in Israel", *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 32(1) p.54.

centred around politics with the aim of making clear to the newcomers which opinions were allowed and which ones were not.[58]

However, the study and practice of Israeli holidays were still key socialization tools. Each celebration commemorated at the Ulpan was accompanied by two or more weeks of rehearsals and explanations about the meaning and rituals involved in each holiday. Every class had to take those classes and participate in the rehearsals, although in the tourist class, sometimes the preparations for the celebrations took longer. It seemed that Jewish students also needed to be taught how to celebrate those holidays as an Israeli and during rehearsals they were asked to modify the way they prayed, behaved or ate. The Passover Seder was perceived by the woman of my class as a defining moment, an occasion where their belonging to the Israeli community would be tested by their partner's families. They saw in it a transformative capacity, as if the adequate performance of the ritual could make them Israelis. This transformative capacity was also observed by Janet Siskud in the American Thanksgiving which has the goal of transforming immigrants into Americans "by connecting them to a cultural history stretching back to the founding of the country."[59]

More than a month before the celebrations, Passover was the topic of most of the conversations among the women of the class. Their anxiety for the coming holiday was well-known by the teacher, and consequently, she decided that the Ulpan´s celebration of Passover would not be enough to calm her students. She proposed to us not only to rehearse a song for the festival but also to rehearse the complete Seder and everybody agreed. Two weeks before Passover, she asked us to bring one food item for the Seder plate and to study the story of Passover as well as the typical songs and prayers of the holiday. She was worried that we would feel left out, or that some of the women would be less liked by their partner's families if they were not able to perform the ritual correctly.

From that point onwards, all of the time in the class was dedicated to Passover. We started with a week of lessons dedicated to the telling of the story of the Exodus. Most of us were familiar with the story. However, the teacher tried to give a detailed account and explanation of it, so everybody had a good basic understanding of the holiday. At different

[58] Deborah Golden. 2002. "Belonging Through Time: Nurturing National Identity Among Newcomers to Israel from the Former Soviet Union", *Time and Society,* 11(1) p.10.
[59] Janet Siskud. 1992. " The invention of Thanksgiving: a Ritual of American Nationality" *Critique of Anthropology*. 12(2) pp.168.

times of her narration, she made some clarifications about the way she interpreted it, and assured us that her views were shared by most Israelis. For example, when she said that "We were forty years in the dessert" she immediately explains that "well, in Israel we don´t believe that literally, we know Egypt is close by." With the aim of involving everyone in the story, she also asked a new Eritrean student how long it had taken him to get to Israel from Egypt by foot; assuming he had followed that path to get to the country. He did not appreciate the question and made clear that although he was happy to speak about political issues he was not willing to talk about his past or his status as a refugee. He told the class, openly, that he did not feel accepted by other Israelis because he was not Jewish, so he preferred not to talk about his origin. The teacher then, aware that she had touched on a difficult topic told him that although the immigration policies of the country were not always friendly, he would soon be feeling at home and she hoped he would be able to stay. She was uncomfortable talking about immigration topics and her behaviour and few words about it made it clear to everybody that she did not agree with the way refugees and non-Jewish partners were treated in the country. However, she never explained her political position to us. She was happy to talk about politics but never to give her point of view; and she expected us to do the same. This seem to be part of the knowledge she wanted us to learn from her; how to talk about the nation without being less national.

The narration of the Exodus was only the beginning of more than 10 classes devoted to Passover. They culminated in a rehearsal of the Passover Seder. But all of these preparations did not calm the apprehension of the students, and most of them found the Seder food repulsive. For the day in which the Seder was taking place, my classmates learned the prayers and songs traditionally used in the ritual, and we all brought the food we were asked for. The teacher set the table and gave each one of us a *Haggadah* where the prayers, songs and the steps to follow during the celebration were listed. However, when the time to eat arrived, nobody, including the teacher was willing to eat much. All of the students had comments about how spicy the horseradish was, or that the *charoset* was too sweet for them. Only one ate a hard-boiled egg. The teacher did not force anybody to eat, but she did comment that, even if the food was unpleasant, it was important to eat everything during the real Seder. To do otherwise, would not give a good impression of them to their families-in-law. The only thing that was enjoyed by the students was the matzah and, realizing this, the

teacher told us not to celebrate it too much as loving matzah was a clear sign of not being Jewish.

Passover is only one of the celebrations that is included in the Ulpan's calendar, and every holiday is studied and practiced. The inclusion of these celebration in the program of the Ulpan shows the interest of the Israeli government in teaching Jewish identity to newcomers, even if they are Jewish. Studying in an Ulpan is a fundamental part of the process of assimilating to the country not only because it is the place in which most people will learn modern Hebrew, but because they will also be taught how to behave like an Israeli.

For the non-Jewish women and the tourists, learning how to follow a Passover Seder was as essential to being considered Israeli as learning the national anthem. Therefore, they have learned that in order to be Israeli it is fundamental to be Jewish. Natasha, for example, one of the youngest Russian women in the class had a really hard time understanding that there were Arab citizens in Israel. She had learned that to be Israeli meant to be Jewish, "you should see how many papers me and my boyfriend had to present so I can stay here. And everything is because I'm not Jewish. His family is not happy, the government is not happy, and his friends treat me differently. You can't be accepted in this country if you are not Jewish, that is why most of us want to convert". For Natasha, the only way to become fully accepted was by being Jewish, and performing Jewishness through the celebration of holidays or keeping kosher, or in her words "becoming more simple than Russians" was the first step in becoming Israeli. Learning how to celebrate Passover was as important to her as learning Hebrew. Therefore, the idea of the existence of citizens in Israel that weren't Jewish (she didn't contemplate the possibility of Arabs being Jewish) did not make any sense. In her experience, and through what she saw and learned by living in Israel the only way to be Israeli was to act Jewish.

The rehearsal in the Ulpan was my first experience of Passover in Israel, but it was not the only one. I received more than 15 invitations for Passover Seders and lunches, so I attended two more celebrations. The attendance at those private celebrations combined with my experience in the Ulpan gave me a more complete vision of how this celebration has been given national meaning and how it is used by both ordinary citizens and elites to socialize newcomers.

Esthers´gefiltefish

I spend the first night of Passover with the Friedman family. The Friedman is a family that can trace their origins to Eastern Europe, although their immediate ancestors lived in the United States. Esther, the great-grandmother of the family, arrived in Israel in the fifties, after marrying an Israeli. She has three daughters that live in different parts of Israel and a son in the United States. They are all married, and she has many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Since Esther was widowed a few years ago, all of the family gatherings take place in the house of her daughter Ruth, who lives with her husband in Ranana, a small town half an hour north of Tel Aviv. Esther celebrates all of the Jewish holidays and cooks traditional Ashkenazi food for all the family celebrations. However, she does not remember the last time she went to a synagogue or fast in Yom Kippur. She was always telling me stories about her mother and how religious she was "My mother, who was a terrible cook, used to keep Shabbat, so when she moved to my house in Israel from the United States, she had a difficult time. She shared a room with my mother-in-law, who was not religious at all. I remembered them fighting every week, as my mother-in-law did her laundry on Saturday morning and my mother could not stand it". Esther described her mother as "a cold woman and a bad cook, who was constantly bothering about my weight and reminding me I was not good enough or thin enough." Although Esther associated negative aspects of her life to religion, she continued maintaining the Jewish traditions and religious festivals, as well as a very basic level of kosher at her home. Ruth, her daughter, had similar points of view.

The Passover Seder I was invited to, took place in Ruth´s house. Most of the family was attending, with the exception of the brother living in the United States and the more religious sister. The rejection of the invitation by Ruths sister´s family was not taken lightly, although the situation was not new and had persisted since she had married.

The preparation of the Seder began a month before the actual dinner, when Ruth started preserving the heads of carps for her mother so she could cook the gefiltefish for Passover. Gefiltefish is an Eastern European dish eaten at Passover and other holidays. The traditional recipe for gefiltefish "called for the flesh of the fish to be removed from the skin, ground up and mixed with other ingredients such as eggs, spices, and ground onions and carrots. The mixture was then stuffed back into the skin and cooked or baked. The laws of Shabbat prohibit removing bones from fish, making fish consumption a bit tricky. Boneless gefiltefish circumvents this problem. In addition, including other ingredients in the ground

fish stretched the amount, so that a poor family would have enough for the entire household"[60]. Nowadays most families will not use ground fish to stuff the fish but will shape it as fish balls that are served together with beetroot. According to Gil Marks, gefiltefish was never the most popular Jewish fish dish. However, the addition of other ingredients like onions stretched the expensive fish, and therefore it became a staple dish for poor Jewish families in East Europe.[61]

It is not easy to find people that like gefiltefish but in the case of my participants, those that did like it were passionate about it. Others said they were only willing to eat the one prepared by their grandmothers but most of them simply avoid eating it. The dislike can be not only related to the flavour of it but to a childhood memory shared by some Ashkenazi Israelis and best explained in the words of Gil, as a woman in her forties with strong repulsions for gefiltefish: "My hate for fish comes probably from the gefiltefish we used to have in Passover. I remember the carp swimming in our bathtub for two days.[62] After the two days, my grandmother took the carp and killed it with a hammer. I remember her hitting the head of the poor fish until she killed it. Yes, I have never eaten gefiltefish again, it was really cruel". The famous Israeli writer Amos Oz also talks about this in his autobiographic novel:

> After the chicken soup with kneidlach, Mother suddenly placed on the table the corpse of my Noonie, complete with head and tail but bearing a series of seven knife-gashes along its side, as splendid as the body of a king being borne on a gun-carriage to the Pantheon. The regal corpse reposed in a rich cream-colored sauce upon a couch of gleaming rice, embellished with stewed prunes and slices of carrot, scattered with decorative green flakes. But Noonie´s alert, accusing, the gaze was fixed unyielding on all his murderers in motionless reproach, in silent torment.[63]

Even though the dish is not loved by many in the last couple of decades, it has been elevated to ritual food. In the same way as the food on the Seder plate, the consumption of gefiltefish makes those who eat it part of the Ashkenazi Jewish collective. It is a symbol of

[60] Rochel Chein. 2013. "What is Gefiltefish?" *Chabad.* Accessed February 2, 2016. http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/622944/jewish/What-Is-Gefilte-Fish.htm.
[61] Gil Marks. 2010, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food.,* New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. p.221.
[62] By swimming in clear water, the carp cleans itself from sand, improving its flavor.
[63] Amos Oz. 2004. *A Tale of Love and Darkness.* 1st English edition. Translated by Nicolas de Lange. London: Ramdom House, p.205.

tradition and continuity than particularly to American and Israeli-European Jews is a reminder of the years of poverty and persecution in Europe. It seems to be that, together with other traditional Ashkenazi dishes like chopped liver that reminds of the poverty in which Jews lived in Eastern Europe, gefiltefish has become part of what Micheal Herzfeld, defines as cultural intimacy. For Herzfeld, cultural intimacy is "the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality, the familiarity with the bases of power, that may at one moment assure the disenfranchised a degree of creative irreverence and at the next moment reinforce the effectiveness of intimidation." [64] Gefiltefish and chopped liver seem to respond to this idea of cultural intimacy, although apparently a culinary embarrassment for Ashkenazi Israelis as well as diasporic Jews, saying that you like it, or eating it is a clear symbol of Jewishness.

Yossi, for example, an American immigrant who although had Jewish roots grew up as a Christian, constantly repeated to me how much he enjoyed gefiltefish, especially the one prepared by his wife's grandmother. The dish was not to the liking of his family-in-law and his insistence in liking it was not welcomed by his mother-in-law. For him, eating gefiltefish was a way to show he belonged to the community but it was understood by his mother-in-law as him "trying too hard to belong". However, although gefiltefish seemed to be a source of the cultural intimacy of Israelis, it was also contested. Moshe for example, a Mizrahi man in his twenties from an Iraqi origin, did not felt at all comfortable with gefiltefish being considered part of the Israeli cuisine: "That's not Israeli, is not Middle Eastern, is white people's food. I hate it; I dislike people thinking that is Jewish food. There are so many delicious dishes, and they have to say that is the most Jewish dish of all. I don't understand why people eat it here". For Moshe, gefiltefish was clearly a source of embarrassment, but it did not provoke cultural intimacy, on the contrary, it marked the differences among Ashkenazi and Mizrahi communities in Israel and their understanding of Israeliness.

But for Esther, gefiltefish meant Passover and together with chopped liver, she prepared both dishes carefully. She also cooked matzo ball soup, another staple dish of the Passover Ashkenazi cuisine. Although she did say to me, she had a preference for Asian flavours, for Passover and most Shabbats she felt she had to cook traditional Ashkenazi food.

[64] Micheal Herzfeld. 2005. *Cultural Intimacy*, NY-London: Routledge, p.3.

She never asked her family if they enjoyed the gefiltefish. It is “what you eat on Passover, and that’s it.”

As this ethnographic material shows, the importance of gefiltefish has little to do with its flavour and much more with what it symbolises. Gefiltefish symbolises, more than any other dish apart maybe from matzo ball soup, the epitome of Jewishness, but also of European Jewishness. Being able to eat it, represents for Yossi his inclusion to the group he wants to belong to and by cooking it, Esther fulfils her role as the carrier of tradition. On the other hand, Moshe dislikes it profoundly not only for its flavour, but also for what it stands for: by saying gefiltefish is Jewish food, his Middle Eastern Jewish cooking traditions are left aside as if by being Middle Eastern and not sharing the European experience he was therefore less Jewish. The importance of this dish also exposes the key relationship between Jewishness and Israeliness. In order to be fully national, it is fundamental to be Jewish, and preferably Ashkenazi.

The Friedman’s Seder

The rest of the dinner was cooked by Ruth. The main course in the Friedman dinner was turkey, a common choice for many Ashkenazi families. In the case of the Friedman family, the American influence in choosing turkey for the menu was evident, as it was accompanied by cranberry sauce and stuffing, both traditional elements in American Thanksgiving. Rice, a bean salad, and an artichoke and onion dish were also part of the menu. This last dish was prepared by Nathan, the husband of one of Ruth´s daughters, who is an enthusiastic cook. Nathan’s dish was not traditional at all, “I like to invent and improvise, I probably took the inspiration from a recipe book.” Contrary to the women cooking the rest of the dinner, Nathan did not feel at all constrained by tradition, he improvised and did not follow any directive or rule related to the holiday. Nathan’s dish made of artichokes and caramelized onions did not aim to transmit Judaism, but to highlight his cooking skills. It is Esther´s role to pass on tradition, she is an elderly woman, while Nathan, a young man did not carry that responsibility. Although Esther and her daughter have control over what is served in their Seder, they are still constrained by the past, and the gender roles imposed on them not only by religion but by the nation. They are in charge of transmitting tradition and identity through the dishes they cook and the menus they choose. As long as they use food to teach their families where they come from, they do not have the chance to innovate. The combination

of traditional dishes cooked by different female generations with the more innovative dishes cooked by Nathan reminds me of the "moral issue"[65] that the Kalymnos women studied by David Sutton faced in balancing tradition and modernity. The mixture of dishes tries to reflect the identity of the cooks as well as of the family that will enjoy it: a family that celebrates their Jewish roots while it simultaneously highlights its secular Israeli identity.

The side dishes of rice and a bean salad served were also part of this balancing act. This was a curious choice as Ashkenazim normally do not consume beans, peas, rice, millet, corn and seeds during Passover. When I asked about these dishes, a discussion started as most of the members of the family could not remember who did not consider them kosher for Passover, Ashkenazim or Sephardim. This confusion between Ashkenazi and Sephardim tradition was common between most of my middle-class Ashkenazi participants, who tried to make a point by saying that these differences are not at all important in Israel. The issue of the rice did not cause any more arguments as these details were seen as too "orthodox" to be concerned with. However, the meal was kosher for Passover and Esther had made sure that all the rules were followed on this occasion, so all the guests could be comfortable. Therefore, there were no dairy products in the dinner, and the desserts (ice cream, almond macaroons, and flourless chocolate cake) were also kosher for Passover. Nonetheless, the silverware was not changed for Passover, so Ruth sister´s family could not spend the holiday with them. Ruth and Esther were not willing to make any concession for her sister, as they saw her religion as a sign of her submission to her husband and not as a "real" thing. Noa´s husband is a Mizrahi Jew, and although Ruth's family tried constantly to show me thar differences between both groups of Jews were long-forgotten, when they talked about Noa´s husband they made clear that the reason for his religiousness did not have to do with faith but with his upbringing in an Oriental and therefore conservative, traditional family. This was a clear reflection of the persistence, even in present-day Israel, of the idea that Mizrahi Jews are backwards, do not treat women properly and are more religious than Ashkenazi Jews.

The Seder was conducted by Yael, Ruth's husband, although everyone was invited to participate. With the exception of Esther, who had a version in English, (that she threw out in the middle of the Seder as she could not follow it) all of us were given a Passover Haggadah in Hebrew. Some parts of the Seder were shortened, but all of the ritual food was consumed.

[65] David E. Sutton. 2014. *Secrets from the Greek Kitchen,* Oakland: University of California Press. p.6.

After the first ritual part of the dinner was over[66], the gefiltefish and the chopped liver were served. Contrary to all other occasions on which I had shared a meal with the family, the children did not have a menu catered for them. All of them were expected to eat and try all the dishes served. I was surprised that although there was a little bit of complaining from them, all of the children ate everything. This attitude was unusual, as I had witnessed constant conflicts around food in the previous months. Children were expected to eat the same as the rest of the guests and to enjoy the food on offer. In their every day, the Friedman children did not eat the same menu as their parents and grandparents, and Ruth cooked special dishes for them. Some of the children were fussy eaters, and they were never forced to eat what they did not like although they were expected to eat something, and eating something even though it was "unhealthy" was perceived by Ruth and her husband as better than nothing. This was also the case in Shabbat, where children were never forced to eat anything they did not want.

The lack of a children's menu made the menu and food choices even more relevant. The children were expected not only to eat the same than the adults, but also to like it. They were constantly asked if they liked the food and encouraged to eat as much as possible, while also leaving space for dessert. Although the Passover dishes can be perceived as difficult for the taste buds of a child and chopped liver and gefiltefish would never be served to children in the Friedman house on other occasions, on Passover they were expected to eat these dishes and did not have a choice in the matter. The symbolism embedded in these food items is more transcendental than their taste or presentation, therefore, refusing to eat them would imply a rejection of tradition, history, and Jewishness. Children, in the same way as the women of the Ulpan, needed to eat everything, and to have a taste of Israel through the food served on Passover. So contrary to any other day, they did not have a choice as Passover food does not have the intention of making kids happy but to show them, literally, the taste of suffering and slavery.

By the end of the dinner, most of the guest were tired, and they did not wait too long before deciding to leave. Everybody praised Esther's cooking as well as Ruth´s turkey and thanked them for the traditional meal that had been provided. A few hours later, the

[66] After the dinner concluding prayers are said.

Friedman house was again full of grandchildren ready to have a much more relaxed Passover lunch.

The Friedman's Passover celebration demonstrates how in the domestic sphere national identity is also transmitted through food. Children that are normally allowed to pick and choose what to eat lose their agency during this holiday and they do not have any say in what they are expected to eat in Passover. Women also lose their autonomy and freedom to choose during the holiday. There is no space for creative cooking; they have to cook traditional food in order to transmit tradition and fulfil their national female duties. In this way women, children and the rest of the family are transformed by the food they eat into Israelis and members of the Jewish nation.

In the case of the Friedmans as well as in the following narration we can see that the transmission of identity relays mainly on women who are expected to cook traditional dishes that will help the family to identify as part of the nation. However, men do not have the duty to follow this guideline, and they are free to innovate and cook as their dishes and side dishes, are there to showcase their skills and abilities not to transmit tradition. The cooking and eating arrangements of the Friedman's Passover Seder reflected some of the basic social hierarchies of the Israeli urban middle-class family. As the role of Esther in the dinner demonstrates, older women are in charge of transmitting tradition and Jewish identity and are therefore expected to cook the most traditional dishes, organize the dinner, and make all the arrangements needed. Meanwhile, men are in charge of the ceremonial aspects of the dinner, and although they are allowed to participate in the dinner preparations, they are not constrained by tradition and have space for innovating and experimenting in the kitchen. Children are perceived as passive actors who, in the same way as immigrants, are transformed through the Passover ritual into members of the nation.

In my next ethnographic vignette, the importance of socializing newcomers will again be fundamental, and Passover will serve as the occasion which reinforces belonging to Israel. However, as will be described, ritual food items are not a requirement for this process to happen, as other elements of Israeli food culture can also serve to perform the nation.

"I´m not a Yiddish mama, but I do my best."

A few blocks from the Friedman house lives Deborah, a Jewish South African woman who immigrated to Israel more than 20 years ago with her husband. Deborah, a mother of two

now in her fifties, works in Tel Aviv for a women's organization that focuses on education and prevention of domestic violence.

I met Deborah after contacting her organization, as I was interested in interviewing some of their members. As I lived so close to Deborah, they immediately connected me with her, and a few days later she invited me for a coffee at her house. After a couple of hours, Deborah decided she needed to take care of me as she thought that women who were married but without their husband around must felt terribly alone. So, she invited me to spend Passover lunch with her family. Contrary to the Passover Seder, the lunch the next day is quite a relaxed occasion and a lot of Israelis often organize barbecues for the occasion. Deborah's family was not the exception, and a huge barbecue was prepared in her garden. Deborah invited her family and close friends but also some of her co-workers and *olim hadashim* (newcomers) from South Africa. Most of the guests, although fluent in Hebrew, preferred to speak in English, even Deborah preferred it and only spoke in Hebrew when it was strictly necessary. Deborah had cooked a huge lunch as she was not sure how many people would attend. When she invited me, she told me "Feel free to come or not. You don´t need to let me know; I guarantee you there will be enough food for you".

More than 20 guests arrived at the lunch, and almost everybody brought a dish: a salad or a dessert. Everything was kosher for Passover, and there were no dairy products on the tables. The food was arranged on the inside of the house in three tables: a fish table, a salad table (that later became the dessert and coffee table) and the meat were kept in the kitchen. The barbecued meat consisted of chicken prepared with a spicy South African marinade and beef brisket. On the fish table, there was gefiltefish and salmon. The salad table had many options: all of them included raw vegetables, and some of them had pulses, but there were no beans, corn or rice. The desserts consisted of non-dairy ice creams, coconut macaroons, pavlovas, fresh fruit and cakes made without using flour or yeast. There was also wine and beer that some of the guests had brought, but there was probably less than a beer per person. Local soft drinks and juices were also available, as well as Coca-Cola.

Although the food was kept inside the house, the drinks were arranged outside in the garden, together with the tables where the guests were sitting. Two hours after Deborah told her guests to arrive, the food was blessed by her husband, and some short and brief Passover prayers were said. There was no Seder plate, but matzah was on the table. The food was arranged as a buffet, so the diners could serve themselves with the exception of the meat

that was served by Deborah in the kitchen. Contrary to the Passover Seder at the Friedmans', places were not assigned, and people kept moving constantly between the tables. The food was served on plastic plates, and the children were not encouraged to eat anything in particular. Special praise was given to the gefiltefish and Deborah took it with pride by telling me: "You know, I´m not a Yiddish mama, but I do my best." This comment made by Deborah allow me to understand than although the lunch was casual and informal she still wanted to make clear to me that she was proud of her European Jewish origins, and that although most of the food was symbolically neutral, the gefiltefish was there to remind the guest they were celebrating a Jewish holiday.

The different groups attending the lunch had various topics of conversation, but most of the people talked about the results of the recent Israeli elections and the security situation in the region. They also asked me constantly about my opinion of the food and reassured me about the importance of food for the Jewish people, especially during the holidays. Deborah's husband told me: "You know what people say right? They tried to kill us; we survived, let´s eat". It's true, that is what we do, we celebrate everything with food, everything is about food. Deborah's husband's comment highlighted again the Jewish character of the celebration, and how the survival of Jewish culture is mainly celebrated through food and cooking. But the famous phrase he used to describe the holiday and its relationship to food also emphasised the political character of Passover. Passover, for Deborah's husband, was mainly a national holiday that commemorates the liberation of the Jewish people, the people of Israel, from slavery and Egypt. He felt identified with the meaning of the holiday as at the time he thought Israel was still in danger and was a persecuted nation. Celebrating Passover not only implied celebrating that remote victory over the pharaohs but the celebration of the victory over contemporary enemies.

After the food had been taken away, most of the women helped Deborah with rearranging the house. It didn´t take long after the meal was over for the guests to start leaving, as almost everybody lived outside the town where the lunch was held. Several people had told Deborah before they left how much they admired her cooking and how ingenious she had been by coming up with such an arrangement of food even when kosher Passover food was so difficult to cook.

Although Deborah's lunch was much more casual than the Seder with the Friedmans, the ritual importance of food for the national identity was not forgotten. The food was still

kosher for Passover, gefiltefish was served, and the abundance of salads reflected the immigrants belief that tables full of vegetable dishes were a characteristic of the Israeli diet. However, diasporic food, in this case from South Africa, also made an appearance, and even when the barbecue meat is still seen as Israeli the spices used were, as explained to me by Deborah, typically from South Africa. The importance of food to the Jewish community especially in holidays was highlighted by Deborah's husband, and people talked constantly while eating, about the food they had the night before, making food even more prominent.

Deborah was in charge of the cooking of the day, although most of her female guests arrived with at least one dish, demonstrating again that cooking, especially for holidays, is a female task. Deborah's husband conducted the informal prayers of the day, and was in charge of general arrangements as well as of carving meat, a domestic task commonly assigned to a man. However, the informality of the lunch made hierarchies less visible than in the Seder..

Conclusion

The three Passover celebrations —the Ulpan rehearsal, the Friedmans' Seder and Deborah's lunch—described above, highlight different aspects of the Israeli culture, and also different ways to celebrate the same holiday. Although the three narratives present completely different scenarios all of them use Passover and the food consumed on this holiday as a way to reinforce the national identity of the newcomers; children or immigrant, that are socialized through this holiday and transformed into Israelis. In the Ulpan, the tension and nervousness that performing the nation can cause to newcomers who do not share one of the main national features is evident through the amount of time that is spent in the rehearsal of holidays. It is a scenario in which we can see how the elites try to impose a particular concept of Israeliness on the immigrants by teaching them how to correctly perform the nation in private holiday celebrations. Non-Jewish female immigrants feel less able to negotiate this imposition as well as less able to become accepted into the nation. Therefore, they look for strategies that allow them to become more national, in the first scenario the search is through a culinary and linguistic conversion and after, through a religious conversion to Judaism.

The Friedmans' Passover dinner takes place in a completely different setting; in the privacy of Ruth's home. However, again we see how Passover is used as a mechanism of socialization for children in which women play a fundamental role. It also highlights family hierarchies and gender roles. Women again are the main carriers of traditions, the agents in

charge of reproducing and teaching the nation. For them the home provides the liberty and authority to decide which elements of the nation and of the diaspora to adopt and to keep but it also means their role as mothers, cooks and women is restrained by tradition.

Lastly, in Deborah's lunch we can see how immigrants again celebrate Passover, but without any anxiety as they feel no need to prove their belonging to the nation as they are Jewish. The political elements of the holiday are highlighted through the conversation and the connection to Israeliness, more than the diaspora through the presentation of fresh salads, a barbecue and non-complicated dishes. The relaxing atmosphere however, is accompanied by political conversations that highlight the threats that the diners perceive are menacing the country.

Jon E. Fox affirms that holidays are "key sites for the collective experience and articulation of the imagined community of the nation"[67], and although not part of the everyday routines, they do serve to mark the passage of time and the rhythms of common life.[68] The different scenarios presented in this chapter had the aim of allowing me to explore how holidays can be used— both by elites and non-elites— to reinforce the sense of belonging to the national community. In some cases, they also reflect social and gender divisions.

The different ways of celebrating Passover and the meaning that my participants give to it show the different understandings of nationhood. They also demonstrate how religious symbols and traditions can be provided with a new national meaning that help the members of a community feel more connected to the nation. While in the Ulpan, national identity is reinforced by a Jewish official discourse that privileged Ashkenazi food traditions; in the home national identity, religious identity and diasporic traditions are negotiated. The results are diverse ways of being Israeli and understanding what this means. The dinner at the Friedmans' and the lunch at Deborah's house also illustrate how the socialization process and the reproduction of national identity occur in the house where parents and friends become the agents through which children and immigrants are taught how to be Israelis. In these scenarios, the idea of nationhood is not only imposed by the elite but reproduced, negotiated and reinterpreted in the rituals of the every day, through the celebration of holidays and the consumption of certain dishes.

[67] Jon E. Fox, 2006 "Consuming the Nation; Holidays, Sports, and the production of Collective Belonging", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29:2, pp.219.
[68] *Ibid.* p.220.

Talal Asad points out that "the religious and the secular are not fixed categories. There is nothing essentially religious"[69] Religion in the case of Israel has become fundamental to being part of the collective, acquiring citizenship and reproducing the nation in the everyday. To be Jewish means to be accepted into the national community and it is through religious holidays, even when they are secularized, that the nation is reproduced, learned and performed. It is clear that nationalism in Israel is mixed necessarily with religious identity, so rituals and holidays are—although Jewish in essence—are manifestations of nationalism and a way to enter the national collective. Those who are not Jewish, are therefore seen as less national, even if they hold a passport or citizenship.

[69] Talad Asad, 2003. *Formations of the Secular, Christianity, Islam, Modernity.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, p.25.

Chapter 6. "How Shabbat has kept Israel: From the Private to the National"

During the summer of 2016, Ayala Grossman invited me to a Friday dinner in her house. Ayala was a dentist in her 50s living in Tel Aviv with her husband and working full-time in a hospital close by. Ayala told me to arrive around five in the afternoon, two hours before her children, so that we had the opportunity to talk without interruption and I could observe her cooking. We had met at the wedding of one of the members of her family, and according to her, she had heard a lot about my research before. She was nervous; she wanted to be helpful and showcase her cooking skills. When I arrived at her house, she had already been cooking for a long time; she was preparing a traditional dish from Transylvania, from where she could trace her ancestors, which consisted of a pie made with layers of cabbage leaves and ground meat with a thin tomato sauce. She had added butter, and laughed about having a non-kosher Jewish dish for Shabbat. She also served roasted cauliflower with melted cheese, a dish she had learned to make while on a low-carbohydrate diet for some months, and which she really came to like. Salads, roast potatoes, and chicken were also served, as well as a "fancy challah,"[1] a seeded whole-wheat challah. When her children arrived, they were impressed with the dinner menu; they immediately told me that their mother never cooked so much for Friday dinner, and that she had made a special effort that night. Before we started eating, Ayala's husband blessed the challah, and the wine, although one of her children did say to me that they did not always do this.

Ayala's children were in their twenties and went to dinner at their parent's house every Friday without complaining. Ayala was responsible for the dinner, and for cooking enough to provide their children with leftovers for the week. Several times, she pointed out the importance of the Friday night dinner to me: "Shabbat dinners are a national tradition. It is the only time during the week I have with my whole family, and I enjoy cooking for them and having them around the table. No, we don't have kosher food or complicated dinners, but as the majority of people in this country do, we will spend this time together. We are a family-oriented country, and Friday dinners are a fundamental part of who we are."

Ayala perceived Shabbat dinners as a feature, not only of Israeli citizens' private lives, but as a key aspect of the national identity and ethos of the country. Friday dinners reinforce

[1] Traditional braided bread.

the family structure of the country and are also a time in which the nation and its core values are performed and reproduced.

In this chapter, I argue that it is through cooking and distributing food that women are able to influence the food choices of their families and to teach them "how to eat like an Israeli". By cooking, choosing menus, and shopping for their families, women are able to pass on tradition, identity, and the values they believe are fundamental. As Carole M. Counihan has pointed about, the ability of women not only to cook food but to distribute it is a key measure of their power in society.[2] Counihan's argument becomes particularly relevant when we observe the way in which Israeli women are able to influence their families, including new members of the family like sons and daughters-in-law through the distribution of food; in particular of Friday dinner leftovers. Distributing food to new comers to the family and the nation allows women to teach these new Israelis how to be Israeli. As I analyse throughout this chapter, women use food as a way to exercise power and influence over their closest social circles. In many cases, this influence may require members of the family to change their diets, in order to respond to their mothers' or mothers-in-laws' idea of a proper Israeli diet.

Nonetheless, as I have mentioned previously; Israeli women, including secular, are still seen as gatekeepers of tradition and family values. Although Friday dinners do allow them to exert influence over other members of the family they are the main people responsible for this event, and even though I did see on some occasions men participating in the cleaning of the table or the cooking, I never encountered a male participant who organized and planned the dinner. Anne Allison pointed out in her famous article about obento boxes and motherhood in Japan, how preparing food for children can become a "double-edged sword for women".[3] On one hand, motherhood, as Allison insightfully points out; is a state ideology.[4] The Friday night dinners in Israel are seen as a fundamental part of the national identity and women as the main organisers of the event. Children are taught in nurseries and primary schools how to make challah dough and then they are expected to bake it at home with their mothers, as "everybody does in Israel". Although some of my participants complained and would preferred to buy the bread or simply avoid it; children are taught in school that baking

[2] Carole M. Counihan and Steven L. Kaplan, 2005. "Introduction" in Carole M. Counihan and Steven L. Kaplan, [ed]. *Food and Gender Identity and Power*. Harwood Academic Publishers: Ithaca. p.2.
[3] Anne Allison, *op. cit.* p.203.
[4] *Ibid.* p.205.

bread for the Friday dinner with their mothers is part of becoming Israeli. Simultaneously, cooking Friday dinner is perceived by women as the only opportunity they have to bring the family together, and to use their cooking skills to make a "personal statement" about who they are.[5]

The food prepared for the Friday dinner is also a manifestation of the ethnic origins of the women who cook them. Baruch Kimmerling suggests that the boundaries of traditionalism in Israel are fragmented and change according to ethnic groups.[6] The Friday dinner table is a clear example of this fragmentation. Friday dinners underline the ethnic, political, and class differences in the country. While, generally speaking, most families spend Friday together around the table, each one of them has different dishes on the table, sing different songs and might speak different languages. Although Shabbat dinner is a domestic celebration in which identity and tradition are transmitted and belonging to the Jewish community is reinforced, it is also on these occasions that the differences and divisions among the Israeli population are more evident. The Shabbat table is a reflection of the way Israeli identity is constructed through everyday practices, reinforced by a dominant Ashkenazi hegemony: "National identity is in reality crosscut by deep internal divisions and only unified through the exercise of different forms of cultural power, to provide an illusion of commonality." [7]

What is Shabbat?

The Israeli weekend starts on Friday morning, and it is characterized by a general state of frenzy. The Carmel market in Tel Aviv and the Ben Yehuda market in Jerusalem are at full capacity, hundreds of women, from *halonim (*secular) to *daatim* (religious) are buying everything they need to prepare for their Shabbat dinners that night. The aroma of challah, can be smelled everywhere, and hundreds of people line up in bakeries to buy the loaves. Around four o'clock, restaurants and shops start closing and by six, cities will completely transform themselves, adopting a relaxed and restful atmosphere. Friday is a short day, shops and businesses will close early in the afternoon, and most people do not work. However,

[5] *Ibid.* p.203.
[6] Baruch Kimmerling. 2001. *The Invention and decline of Israeliness*, Berkeley-LA: University of California Press. p.131.
[7] Tim Edensor. 2002. *National identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*. Oxford-New York: Berg p.24.

women will start preparations for the dinner early in the morning, especially religious women that will also need to cook for the next day. The meals for Friday and Saturday have to be ready before the Shabbat commences 18 minutes before sunset, after which the prohibitions to work start. Yet, religious women are not the only ones cooking; secular women will also devote part of their Friday to preparing a meal for that evening.

The Shabbat is the focal point of Jewish life, and also of Israeli life. But it has a different connotation while in the diaspora as well as for orthodox families in Israel; Shabbat dinner is a religious celebration; in Israel, it is part of the weekly routine, a family gathering without religious connotation that is practiced by secular individuals. Families will get together around Friday's dinner every week and will eat a copious meal that will mark the end of the working week and the beginning of the time to rest. Shabbat dinner means conviviality, family time, and food. Although there might be prayers, especially if there are children, this will be seen more like a national tradition, a way to show the young ones the practices of their parents. As in the case of Ayala's family, two, three or more generations of the family will spend dinner together, and children will be taught, even in secular families, to light the Shabbat candles and to say the prayers over bread and wine. Again, secular families do not perceive religion as the main point of the Friday dinner but as the family event of the week; an event that reinforces the family values of the country.

According to the Torah, the Jewish Bible, God created the world in six days, and on the seventh day, he rested (Genesis 2:1-3). Since God created human beings in his image, humans, in the same way that he did, must rest on the seventh day of the week. God gave this precept to the Jewish people in the Ten Commandments during the Exodus, when the people of Israel were instructed to, "Remember the Shabbat day and keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). Since then, the Shabbat has become the focal point of Jewish life around the world, and its importance for Jewish identity has been summarized in the popular saying, "More than Israel has kept the Shabbat, the Shabbat has kept Israel."[8] This saying reinforces the idea that it is in keeping traditions that the Israeli nation has survived over time, and it also emphasises the importance of the family for the country.

Shabbat starts on Friday evening with the lighting of the Shabbat candles. Married women light two candles while a single woman should only light one. According to the Torah,

[8] Rabbi Wayne Dosick. 2007. *Living Judaism.* New York: Harper Collins Ebooks. p.130.

the matriarch Sarah was the first woman to light the Shabbat candles and they burned miraculously for a week. The candles represent the peace of the home, the light that keeps the family from falling into the darkness.[9] They are also a reminder of the first act of creation, light being the first thing that God created.[10] Following the role taken by the matriarch Sarah, Jewish women have the principal role in keeping Shabbat: shopping, cooking, and making sure everything in the house is ready for a day of absolutely no work is a great responsibility. Further, as with almost all religious, domestic Jewish tasks fall into the category of female duties.

Men also perform their traditional duties: praying. During Shabbat, the *Kiddush* (sanctification) is said. The *Kiddush* should be recited over wine, although, in recognition of those that do not have wine, it can also be said over challah. In Orthodox Judaism, the male head of the household is the one in charge of reciting the *Kiddush.* Although in progressive Judaism women are allowed to do this as well, and everybody is welcome to join the prayer, all of the Israeli families I spent time with, independently of how secular they felt, always let the oldest man of the family do the blessing.[11]

During Shabbat, all work is forbidden, and there is a total of 39 prohibitions related to this commandment. Some of them are: doing business, handling and spending money, lighting fire (or electricity), driving or riding any vehicle, using the phone or the computer and of course, cooking.[12] However, according to Orthodox Judaism, it is not only about not working, "Shabbat is so special that even our choice of words, comportment, and the items that we touch must be consistent with this holy day." [13] Shabbat is the central celebration of Jewish life; it breaks the weekly routine and inserts sacred time into the secular space of the

[9] Menachem Posner, 2014. *Chabad.org* [Online} Available at: http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/633659/jewish/What-Is-Shabbat.htm [Accessed 1 September 2016].
[10] Rabbi Wayne Dosick, *op. cit,* p.375.
[11] Progressive and Orthodox Judaism not only have different practices but also a different approach to the Torah. While orthodox Jews believe it comes directly from God, progressive Jews understand it as a God-inspired text. Practice varies according to different communities, not only in worship, but in the everyday. In terms of food practices, Orthodox Jews will follow a strict kosher diet at all times, while among Progressive Jews practices will vary. In Israel, Progressive Jews (even if they consider themselves religious) will call themselves *hiloni*, secular, in contrast to the Orthodox communities, or the Mazorti (traditional/modern Orthodox) Jews. Reform Judaism 2016, *Reform Judaism* [online].
Available at: http://www.reformjudaism.org/shabbat-customs, Access 5 September 2016.
[12] *Op. cit,* p. 374.
[13] Menachem Posner, *Loc. cit.*

everyday.[14] It is also the most important observance in Judaism. Shabbat is central to the secular life of Israelis as well. Most of them will not adhere to all of the Shabbat prohibitions, and for most Israelis it has become a day of rest to spend with family and friends.

However, although talking of a family event that is as secular as a British Sunday Roast, the family hierarchies prevalent in more orthodox families have not vanished from secular ones, and the gender division of roles is particularly noticeable on Shabbat. In the next section, I continue reflecting on this topic and its relationship to nationhood.

Shabbat food and family structure

The Friday night dinner is a clear example of how families, and especially women, deal with private power relations. It illustrates power relations not only among men and women, but between women from different generations and with different roles in the family as well as control and friendly (and not so friendly) competition. [15] Food, in this case cooked food, is manipulated by women in order to restate the family hierarchy and the role they play in it. Food acts both as "weapon and a blanket, a means of control and of protest".[16]

The unavoidability of the weekly dinner is the first mechanism through which family hierarchies are reinforced, as the younger members of the family must accommodate their plans to attend dinner, and women must centre their activities on the preparation of the meal. Most families will organize the Friday dinner at least three times a month, and some of them will also make a Shabbat lunch. Friday dinners are not seen as religious events or special occasions, they are part of the everyday life of a family, a weekly meeting which on anniversaries or birthdays can then become a celebration.

Most of my younger informants, like Ariel, would complain about how Friday dinner made their weekend feel shorter as they were not free to do whatever they wanted on Friday. Nevertheless, on those rare occasions when Ariel's family did not meet for dinner he attended friend's family dinners or he would organize small dinners with friends.

Esther and Ruth (previously mentioned in several chapters), spend Friday evening and Saturday breakfast and lunch together with their family. The Friedman family was originally from the United States and Central Europe, and although some of their children have Mizrahi

[14] Joelle Bahloul. 1983. *Le Culte de la Table Dressee*. Paris: Editions Metailie, p.214.
[15] David. E. Sutton, 2014. *Op. cit.* p.20
[16] Nir Avieli, 2017. *Op. cit* p.14

partners, they considered themselves Ashkenazi. Their Shabbat dinners always consisted of two menus: one for the children and one for the adults, although on some occasions some of the dishes were shared with slight changes for the kids. A typical Shabbat menu in Ruth's house consisted of:

Adults' Menu	**Children's Menu**
Wine (1 cup for the whole table)	Grape Juice
Challah	Challah
Chicken soup with kneidlach	Chicken soup with *Shkedei Marak*[17]
Esther's stuffed cabbage rolls	Israeli chopped salad without onion
Israeli chopped salad	Ptitim[18] or roast potatoes
Chicken schnitzels	Chicken schnitzels without spices
Strawberries with soy cream	Strawberries with soy cream
Chocolate cake	Chocolate cake
Tea or instant coffee	

Ruth considered this a standard, simple Israeli menu, even if it included distinctively Ashkenazi recipes (e.g. stuffed cabbage, chicken soup with kneidlach). Alongside these dishes, she included those she perceived as properly Israeli; chopped salad, ptitim, and chicken schnitzels. Esther cooked at least one dish per dinner, and normally her dishes were typically Ashkenazi. In contrast to Passover, children were not obliged to eat any of the "adults' food" as long as they had eaten "something", and Ruth would comply with any last-minute craving their grandchildren would have. She would also serve the children's food at a different temperature than the rest, and she was especially careful with the soup.

Even if the menu changed, two elements were never missing from the Friedmans' table: wine and challah. The wine was not necessarily kosher, as Ruth was always on the look-out for good wines, but she preferred Israeli wines. They were, like most of my participants, extremely proud of the country's wine industry, and although they dislike the sweetness of

[17] Also known as "soup almonds", they are tiny bright yellow dough croutons. There are produced by an Israeli company and a firm favourite of Israeli children.
[18] Known in the United States and the United Kingdom as Israeli couscous. It is the equivalent of the Italian fregola.

traditional Jewish Shabbat wine, they did emphasise the importance of supporting their wine industry.

Challah was the element always present at their Shabbat table. In fact, nowadays it is almost impossible to speak of a Shabbat dinner without challah. Although it is traditionally an Ashkenazi egg bread originally from Poland, it is now consumed by most Jewish communities. But, this was not always the case. It is believed that in the times of the Temple, challah consisted of flat bread and was thus rather different to what we now know as challah. As time passed, every Jewish community developed their own traditions, and while the Ashkenazi made bread with white flour and enriched it with eggs especially for Shabbat, the Mizrahim used to eat the same loaves of bread that they did during the rest of the week.[19] The modern braided loaf has its origins in fifteenth century Austria and southern Germany where it became popular, and presently the braided shape is the most popular one in Israel.[20]

Baking challah is a sacred domestic female task; in the same way that men's religious duty is to pray in the synagogue, it is women's duty to bake a special bread for Shabbat. This custom originates from the sacrificial offering that was made during Shabbat to the Temple.[21] As mentioned previously, children are also taught how to bake it as soon as they begin attending kindergarten. The Shabbat tradition dictates that two loaves of bread should be included in the Shabbat dinner. These loaves represent the double portion of manna that fell on Friday during the Exodus, and they are traditionally covered before they are blessed.[22]

With the exception of challah and wine, there were no other traditional Jewish elements in the Friedmans' dinners, and each Friday the menu varied enormously. However, all of my participants, like Ayala and Ruth, agreed that the Shabbat dinner should be abundant; generally, two main dishes were served (one with fish and the other one meat) as well as soup, several salads, and desserts. The choice of the menu can vary according to the origin of the family, its social class, and age groups. This makes it almost impossible to complete a list of standard dishes found on the Israeli Shabbat menu, in contrast with the English Roast dinner, that is less varied. However, Ashkenazim menus tend to have more in common with each other than with the menus of other Jewish communities. Claudia Roden

[19] Gil Marks.201., *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food,* New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons. p.97
[20] *Loc. cit.*
[21] *Loc. cit.*
[22] *Ibid.* p.96.

affirms that, “the whole Ashkenazi world has a common standard menu for the Shabbat, most of which dates back to the Middle Ages. On Friday night in medieval Germany, they ate challah a braided bread, salt herring and stuffed freshwater fish, broth with noodles, followed by meat pies, pickled or boiled beef or roast goose, stuffed neck and noodle pudding. Today meat pies have gone, and roast chicken has replaced roast goose”.[23] Indeed, it is true that although several different recipes are used in a Shabbat dinner, a traditional Ashkenazi menu will follow the structure described by Roden: soup with dumplings, a fish dish, meat or chicken main course, challah, and some side dishes.

On the contrary, Roden also argues that in contrast to the Ashkenazi world, the Sephardic world does not have a standard menu, as there are as many Shabbat dishes as there are Sephardic communities in the world.[24] The mix between Ashkenazi and Sephardi traditions has resulted in the impossibility of talking about a standard Israeli Shabbat menu. Chicken schnitzel, hummus and tahini and Israeli salad[25] can be considered staples in the Israeli menu, especially if the household includes children, but they may or may not appear at the Friday dinner. Most families will use old family recipes if they have them, and will highlight their roots in their menu. On other occasions, they might prefer to experiment with new flavours or even order food. Joan Nathan provides three examples of possible Israeli Shabbat menus:

Minsk Menu

Challah /gefilte fish/ Friday night brisket/ kosher dill pickles/ potato kugel/carrots/hot fruit compote/ almond bread.

Old New York Sephardic Menu

Challah/Sephardic cold spicy fish/fassoulia (Sephardic string bean and meat stew)/ green salad/ fruit cup with sherbert

Hungarian Menu

Challah/ Chicken noodle soup/ chicken paprika/ rice/ cucumber salad/apple strudel.[26]

[23] Claudia Roden. 1996 *The Book of Jewish Food.* London: Penguin Books p.27.
[24] *Ibid.* p.28.
[25] Israeli salad, also known as Arab salad, consists of a mixture of fresh vegetables, mainly radish, peppers, onion, tomato and cucumber that are chopped and dressed with olive oil and lemon. It is a popular saying that the smaller the vegetables are chopped, the better the cook–who is generally female–is.
[26] Joan Nathan. 1988. *The Jewish Holiday Kitchen,* New York: Schocken Books p.19.

Nathan's examples reveal the diversity of the Israeli Shabbat menu, deeply rooted in the experience of the diaspora and impossible to standardize. I attended more than 20 Shabbat dinners in Israel, and I was unable to find any similarities in the menus of the families. As mentioned previously, among Ashkenazi families like the Friedmans or Ariel's family, roast chicken was a common choice. However, it was only in Mizrahi dinners that I got a fish dish. While the Friedman family would serve soup and a small amount of Middle Eastern small dishes like hummus, Ariel's mother would fill the dining table with tiny dishes, similar to the Arabic mezze and would not serve any soup. In spite of all the differences, it is possible to say that between Mizrahi and Hungarian families there is an interest and a preference for reproducing the recipes cooked by their ancestors in the diaspora, while most Ashkenazi families preferred to experiment with new and neutral flavours especially from Asia. Ashkenazi families have also adopted dishes that they classified as Mizrahi, although their origin is mainly Palestinian.

These choices will be further discussed in the next chapter, nonetheless, it is already important to emphasise that dishes like hummus and tahini sauce are usually part of the Ashkenazi Shabbat menu. These dishes labelled as Israeli are perceived as national, and have been 'de-arabized' in order to become edible by Jewish Israelis. The Israeli salad, for example, a chopped salad of fresh vegetables (radish, peppers, tomatoes, onion, and cucumber) is a traditional dish in many Middle Eastern countries, but was also a staple dish in the diets of the kibbutzniks. This salad, originally known as "Ben-Gurion" salad, was copied from the culinary repertoire of the region by the pioneers, as it was a practical way to consume the available vegetables. Afterwards, it was appropriated and became one of the staple dishes of Israel. It is present in almost every household and in the majority of weekday and weekend meals, including breakfast.

The "Israeli salad" is one of the few common elements among the menus of Israeli households, and it contributes to the mixture of diasporic and local dishes that can be seen in a Shabbat dinner. Yet, some new, 'trendier' dishes are also making appearances on the Friday menu. One of them is roasted cauliflower, which is seen as one of the dishes that represents Israeliness and modernity. Its popularity began with the recipe for "Roasted Cauliflower" by the famous Israeli chef Eyal Shani, who later became a global phenomenon. It is one of the most popular dishes served at his restaurant, *Miznon,* which has opened branches outside of Israel, in Paris and Vienna. This dish, now classified as authentically Israeli,

originates from traditional Palestinian dishes that use cauliflower as a staple ingredient, and is reproduced by domestic cooks and showcased with national pride.

The inclusion of Asian food or certain flavours or ingredients is also common. Among Asian food, Japanese food – especially sushi – is particularly popular. Its popularity is consequent, partially, of the fact that almost all of the ingredients (with the exception of sea food) are kosher. That makes it easy for those cooking at home, as well as for restaurants, to serve kosher Japanese food. However, since most of my participants wanted me to experience traditional Jewish cooking, I was never served Asian food during Shabbat. Yet, they did tell me on several occasions that they liked to experiment with their Friday night menus, as it was the only day of the week in which they cook a whole meal. Most Israeli women I talked to worked full-time jobs and left their children in childcare and with their grandparents. Therefore, neither young working women or older women taking care of their grandchildren had time to cook every day of the week: Shabbat was the only opportunity, not only to have a family meal, but to show their culinary skills.

As previously explained, one of my male participants used the term "Israeli style motherhood" to labelled the role of working women in the house. He believed, that the way Israeli women performed their traditional role as mothers and housemakers with full-time jobs was something to be proud of and not a sign of inequality. However, he never mentioned whether men shared the domestic work, as it seemed that child bearing was shared between mothers and grandparents, but not necessarily between mother and father. This "Israeli style motherhood" in which women work and are simultaneously in charge of all the domestic duties was particularly noticeable on Friday dinners. Women are responsible for shopping, cooking, and serving food and, on some occasions, men and younger women are in charge of washing dishes. The choice of menu is also in the hands of women, and is not an easy task. Allergies, food preferences, and different diets are always taken into account to please the palates of all of the family members, while other considerations such as price, convenience, time to cook, and origins of the recipes are also not neglected.

All of these activities performed by women are commonly taken for granted by families who see them simply as the duty of women, independently of their work outside the house. Authors like Rita Felki have pointed out that women can find both strength and power

but also repression in these reproductive activities that conform to the everyday.[27] These is the case for my informants, who were able to express themselves through cooking, planning menus and shopping and nonetheless were also restrained by the roles imposed to them by a society that expects women to carry out these tasks whether they like them or not.

In the case of the Friedman family, Ruth is in charge of choosing the menu, cooking, and shopping. However, her mother Esther is always a vigilant presence that has a fundamental and decisive opinion, especially over the menu choice. Depending on the occasion, Ruth prepares a dish or two for everyone, or adapts a traditional one for the diet of one of the members of the family. Sometimes, Ruth consults her sisters, especially if the family is celebrating a special occasion, like a birthday or a visit from some relatives living abroad. Ruth, when cooking traditional dishes always mentioned the importance of her mother's opinion; Ruth constantly worries about this, even when she normally only receives praise from her. Esther's opinion was always more important than Ruth's husband's, which was taken into account only on one occasion in which his family was directly involved. The judgement of the eldest women in the family was key in making any domestic decisions. Even when Esther's feelings and thoughts were discarded in matters of politics or the discussion of current events, when talking about food preparation, recipes, shopping, or even decoration, she was always able to exert a certain influence, and she was even feared by the rest of the female members of the family. The same happened with Ruth; she had a decisive impact over the diets of her children and grandchildren. Both Esther and Ruth were able to use their cooking skills as a tool to take certain control over the life of their closest ones, and to impose the values they believed were important through their cooking.

Thus, through cooking not only do they exert power, but they also pass on tradition, and their understanding of the nation through the way food is served. After the Kiddush recited by her husband, Ruth serves the food. A few salads appear in the table before people sit down, which cannot be touched until the wine and bread are blessed and consumed. After that, Ruth serves the first course, if there is one, which in most occasions is soup. It is served in the kitchen and brought to the table on individual plates. This is the only dish that she serves, and everybody is free to indicate her how much soup they want and if they want vegetables or dumplings in it. It is not common to be served a first course in Israel, as most of

[27] Rita Felki. *op. cit.* p.95.

the time all of the food is served at the same time. Many of my informants found it rude to give plates that already had food on them to their guests. Therefore, they preferred to put all the plates in the middle of the table and let everybody help themselves to as much or as little food as they wanted. "Double dipping" is also allowed in Israel, and some of my participants did ask me if I felt uncomfortable with it. Although the informality of the Israeli meal is not lost in Shabbat, cooking a first course that can be soup or fish is a reminder about the importance of the day. Contrary to some other occasions, especially barbecues and Shabbat lunches, the Friday dinner food is presented at the central table and not on side tables.

On most weekends, Ruth's family also gets together for Shabbat lunch, although the lunch is not mandatory as the Friday dinner is. When most of the family is able to attend, or when extra guests are invited, the menu consists typically of barbecued meat and salads, and some special dishes for the children. On other occasions, when fewer family members attend, Shabbat lunches consists of the leftovers from Friday night or dishes that allow the children to participate in the preparation, like pizzas. Yet, even on these occasions, Ruth could be criticized for serving too many leftovers: for instance, her family complained constantly about her truffles, which consisted of chocolate cake leftovers mixed with melted butter and shaped as individual truffles. She made them anyway, and her grandchildren loved them, so she ignored any complaints their parents had.

On Shabbat lunches, in contrast to Friday nights, there is not a set table and children always eat before the adults in a disorderly way. There are no blessings, and although the food is always kosher, there was no explicit mention of this fact. Esther is always happy to cater for the different diets of her family members, and she sometimes makes different versions of the same dish hoping that everybody has a taste of the traditional dishes. On more than one occasion she brought gluten free blintzes[28] to Ruth's Shabbat lunches, made only with eggs, so that one of her nieces could eat them; given that she would also prepare vegan or vegetarian versions of any dish, she did not seem to be bothered by the extra work.

Ruth's sons and daughters, as well as their partners, always expect to go back home with some leftovers for the week, and Ruth sees this as part of her duty as a mother and a good mother-in-law, since she doubts the ability of her daughter and daughter-in-law to cook.

[28] Originally from East Europe, blintzes are unleavened pancakes that are then cooked, filled most of the time with white cheese, and pan-fried. Gil Marks, *op. cit.* p.56.

She does this even when she knows her son and son-in-law are good cooks, but she does not expect them to cook everyday meals. Most weeks her grandchildren stay at her house on Friday night, so Ruth also cooks breakfast for them. I was never able to witness a Saturday breakfast, as Ruth considered that making pancakes for her grandchildren was not a proper meal or an Israeli one, but rather an American tradition that they had picked up and that children liked, and therefore not worthy of anthropological inquiry.

Friday night dinners, as well as Shabbat lunches, give Ruth the possibility not only of bringing her family together once a week, but also of reasserting the family structure. Although they are a secular family, they always pray the Kiddush on Friday dinners. Praying the Kiddush highlighted gender roles: men pray while the older women of the family have control over the menu and even over the food preparation. The blessing of wine and bread, according to Joelle Bahloul, represents the dialogue that is established in Shabbat between the Jewish collective and the divine.[29] The performance of the Kiddush is a fundamentally masculine task, and surprisingly, the secular families that I visited did not question or break the tradition that dictated that the head of the household should recite the blessing. However, women were more open to sharing the blessing of the candles with the children of the family as a way of transmitting traditions and making them feel part of the celebration. According to my participants, the prayers were made with the didactical aim of teaching children their origins, not with religious intentions. All of my participants agreed that it was extremely important for children to know their roots, their Jewish origin, even if praying was something only done on Friday and in the grandparents' house. They were not taught to pray for religious reasons but as one element of their national identity.

The selection of dishes was not fortuitous: the mixture of Ashkenazi and local dishes is what Ruth imagines an "average Israeli table" should look like. Old diasporic dishes cooked by older generations, mixed with Israeli simple dishes and innovative salads made by the younger members of the family. The dishes are a reflection of who she believes belongs to the nation and how they can be unproblematically merged together. From her point of view, the Ashkenazi tradition, the Mizrahi tradition, and the local tradition can be mixed without any issues, given that the result of this is a "simple, average Israeli menu." Yet, as will be analysed in Chapter 7, the local dishes that are included as Israeli have been stripped from

[29] Joelle Bahloul. *op. cit.* p.216.

their Palestinian origins, and although some Israelis will accept their roots, most will only label them as Arab, or local or Middle Eastern. In that way, they become edible, and sometimes even national.

That labelling allows Ruth to present her Shabbat table as the epitome of the "unproblematic melting pot" in which food is simple, and the histories of the dishes do not clash but become part of the national food culture and its diversity. That is the image that she not only believes in, but that she wants to transmit to others. She not only wanted to convey this through her cooking but also in the way she handled her household. Meals were informal events in which everybody was welcome, even if there was political disagreement or some family dispute. That disorderly way of eating, the family's style of serving huge plates of food placed in the middle of the table allowing everybody to eat as much as they want, is part of what Ruth and her family understand as Israeli. Shabbat lunches are casual events, as it was still important to demonstrate opposition to the European bourgeois manners that the pioneers despised. Ruth believes that Israel is a welcoming, family-oriented, informal and "easy-going" country and, therefore, she performs this informality and openness in her house every weekend. There is no space for violent conflict at her table: conflict is something imposed on them by the enemies of Israel, contrary to the values of peace and warmth that she perceives is at the centre of her national identity.

Nostalgic or national choices

Shabbat dinner, together with holidays, were the only occasions during which I was able to eat dishes that were directly related to the origins of the family hosting me. Noa cooked Tunisian food for Shabbat, while Ayala served Hungarian dishes, and Ruth and Esther always included an Ashkenazi dish. All of these women were in their fifties, while younger participants in their thirties did not include those dishes. For example, Ariel organized several dinners in which I was asked to cook Mexican kosher food, so he, his friends and families had the opportunity to try something different. When I was invited to spend Shabbat with their families they organized barbecues; those barbecues were large gatherings organized by young couples that because of the distance or lost parents were now in charge of their own Shabbat dinners. They invited neighbours and friends, and normally nobody above forty was present. Because older women were not there to take the role of preservers of tradition and younger women were busy with work and small children, the menu choices were dictated by

convenience and quality and therefore barbecues, the national pastime, were an obvious choice. Tamar, one of Ariel's friends, and her husband Omer invited me to one of their Friday barbecues, which were frequented by their closest friends and neighbours. While Omer was outside barbecuing, Tamar and I stayed in the kitchen with her daughters while she was preparing some salads, some of which were store-bought including hummus and aubergine with mayonnaise. She was also making a homemade chopped Israeli salad as well as some chopped fruit for the children. Tamar said to me, "I know this is not cooking, I really want you to talk with my grandmother or, better even, Omer's grandmother. You know my grandmother only does typical Ashkenazi food, but Omer's grandmother is not only Iraqi but also religious, so she starts cooking on Friday at five in the morning. Her food is amazing, not this crazy, chaotic thing you see here, typically Israeli but real traditional food, like in the old times."

My brief conversation with Tamar revealed a very particular understanding and classification of food. First, she valued Mizrahi cooking more as she considers her Ashkenazi background too typical and not "exotic" enough to be of interest. This resonated with Ruth's idea that her food was too simple, standard even, when she elaborated on dinners that included two menus, one for adults and one for children. Ayala also insisted that I meet her Moroccan religious friend that makes couscous by hand. Tamar, as well as both Ruth and Ayala, insisted that I had to visit their religious Mizrahi relatives or friends to see real cooking, because their own food was simple or chaotic, and "too Israeli." It seemed that they saw religious Middle Eastern practices as much more interesting than their cooking, as if their menus and traditions were reproducible in any house, while the Mizrahi religious food was much more interesting and unique, and therefore deserved more scholarly attention. They also wanted me to observe different Friday dinners, so that I could experience the diversity of the country and the multiethnicity that is an element of national pride. It was also a way to show me that the divisions between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi, as well as religious and secular, were not as profound as they once were and even they, haloni Ashkenazi women, had relatives and friends that were religious and Mizrahi.

With the exception of Ruth who did take me to Noa's house, Tamar and Ayala cancelled my meetings with their Mizrahi relatives one or two days before they were meant to take place. Both said it was too complicated for them to see me; "different cultures you know? They don't understand why you to want to cook with them," said Tamar, and instead

took me out for lunch to an Ethiopian restaurant as if this was an almost perfect substitution for the "ethnic" experience I would have had with her husband's grandmother.

Tamar, Ayala, and Ruth's attitudes towards Mizrahi women and their cooking was a mix of admiration and compassion, as they perceived them as trapped women bound by tradition. Yet, they also felt less accomplished in the kitchen than them: given that they did not spend as much time cooking as their Mizrahi female counterparts, they felt less accomplished in the kitchen than their relatives. This I interpret as symbolic of the still-prevalent division of gender roles in Israel. Even when most women are working full-time and are "Israeli style mothers" they still feel guilty for not spending as much time in the kitchen, taking care of their families, as others do. Some of them had decided to avoid cooking "simple" Israeli food for Shabbat and spend most of the day in the kitchen, even if it was one of the only days of rest in the week. For them, Shabbat was the occasion to reproduce the dishes of their childhood, or those that had an important place in their family history. Friday dinners were nostalgic occasions in which the family not only came together but used it to remind themselves of their roots outside the country.

One of my informants, Hava, who has a Hungarian background, constantly looked for goulash (a traditional Hungarian stew made with beef and potatoes) recipes to cook on Friday night. She recalled the smell of the first time her father had cooked it:

> I remember the day I tried goulash for the first time. I was probably ten when my father and his brother, after more than twenty years of being apart, saw each other again. My uncle came to visit us, and they decided to cook their mother's goulash together. My grandmother had died in a concentration camp when they were young, so it was only through the memory of the smell of her food that they were able to recreate her dish. I still remember the flavour it; it was perfect. My father started cooking after that day, and we looked for Hungarian recipe books everywhere. Now it is easy to find them, but at that time, to be Israeli meant to eat Polish chicken soup, so it was not easy. I have some books now, but I will never be able to get the flavour of that first goulash again.

This kind of story repeated itself in most of my interviews with second and third generations of Holocaust survivors. Ayala constantly cooked Hungarian food from recipe

books that she treasured even when her parents had not made it frequently. Her great grandparents had died during the Holocaust, which is why her parents had migrated to Israel. Hava and Ayala saw a way to reconnect with their past in these recipes even when the chain of transmission of culinary knowledge was broken. The need to reproduce the dishes of lost mothers or grandmothers led them on a frenetic search for cookbooks that would allow them to reproduce the recipes that nobody was able to teach them, or that they could only remember vaguely or that belonged to family legends. David Sutton maintains that, "It is the taste of food that is key to unlocking memories of all sorts, personal, familial, local and national.[30]" The reproduction of recipes carried out by my participants responded to the search for memories mentioned by David Sutton.

Cooking these family dishes and consuming them in a family setting allowed my participants to recover the few memories they had of lost members of their family, sometimes of people they had never met, and to feel connected with their past in the diaspora. They also exemplified the impossibility for the "New Hebrew" to forget those countries where they came from, even if they had been born in Israel. The New Hebrew that was supposed to leave the diaspora in the past and recreate himself as a strong Israeli was unable to cut his attachments with the old land. Food was one of the ways in which this was manifested. European dishes never completely dissapeared and those that did have been recovered by second and third generations of immigrants that grew up listening the stories of the old land, some stories of persecution but some of nostalgia. Even when participants like Ayala consider themselves, not only Israeli, but Zionist with a strong attachment to the country, the diasporic experience cannot be completely erased. This experience was not exclusive to Ashkenazi participants, on the contrary, the nostalgia for their countries of origin is even more prevalent among the Mizrahim, like Chen's Moroccan grandmother that did not feel her immigration to Israel was the homecoming promoted by the government, but an exile.

The nostalgic dishes that were recovered through recipe books were only prepared for family gatherings like Shabbat. I also observed that while many of my Ashkenazi participants pointed out in conversations that they were happy to experiment with foreign and "exotic" flavours, when I was invited they cooked these nostalgic dishes, which they

[30] David E. Sutton. 2014. *Secrets from the Greek Kitchen.* Oakland*:* University of California Press. p.47.

perceived as “their food” so as to show me ‘real’ Jewish cooking. Both the Hungarian women that I met made particular effort when talking with me or cooking for me to showcase Hungarian dishes. They did this with the intention of showing me that their food, Hungarian Jewish food, was not “grey tasteless Ashkenazi food,” but something completely different. They highlighted that their food had little in common with “Polish and Russian boring cooking,” adding: “if you think the Ashkenazi food is boring and bland you have been eating the wrong kind, Hungarian food has nothing to do with that boring Polish food, and it is still Ashkenazi.”

The openness to experiment, the determination to keep their culinary traditions, or even to rediscover them was, among most of my participants, a female endeavour. It is women, commonly in charge of domestic tasks such as cooking, who decide what they believe is acceptable food to be eaten in the home and what is not: what they take from other cultures, which dishes they preserved from their family tradition, and which dishes they erased. Ayala was shocked to hear that her son-in-law enjoyed the gefiltefish cooked by her mother. Ayala, without hesitations, said laughing: “well, he should eat it while he can because when she is gone the gefiltefish will also be gone.” Again, women, as keepers of tradition, believe they have the right to decide what families keep and what they forget, especially in culinary matters, as they will be the ones cooking. This, of course, is not exclusive to Israeli or Jewish women. Talking about Gullah women, Josephine A. Beoku-Betts argues that, “Cultural preservation through food preparation and feeding is a highly conscious act on the part of these women: it is tied closely to their judgments about when to accept and when to resist change.”[31]

One of the main goals of preserving tradition and showcasing it on Shabbat dinner is to socialize newcomers into Israeli society and the family. Children and immigrants had to learn rites, prayers, dishes and behaviours that were approved during this dinner. Women, consequently, are t in charge of this socialization: they see this as one of their nationalist duties, and one of the key aspects of private life in which the nation is performed.

[31] Josephine A. Beoku-Betts. 1995. “We have Our Way of Cooking Things: Women, Food and Preservation of Cultural Identity Among the Gullah” *Gender and Society* 9(5), p.553.

Distributing leftovers

As emphasised throughout this chapter, the matriarchal structure of the Israeli family is reinforced especially through family gatherings like Friday dinners. This structure, in which women have almost all of the control over family decisions, and especially over any aspect of the private life of the family, is in line with Jewish traditional gender roles, in which Jewishness is transmitted by the mother and women are responsible for all domestic aspects of religion. All my informants and their families, regardless of ethnic background or social class, reproduced the matriarchal structure of the Israeli family. Women have the responsibility, even if they work full-time, of managing the household, a responsibility that also gives them a certain freedom and power over other members of the family. Friday dinners showcase the predominant role women play in the private sphere, in which cooking is their main tool to exert power.

All of my female participants with families oversaw Friday dinners or Saturday lunch, with the only exception being barbecues that are predominantly male events.[32] Yet even in the case of barbecues some of them were not willing to leave the organization of the event completely in their partners' hands. Ruth constantly complained of her husband's inability to host a proper barbecue, and on many occasions she ended up cooking the meat herself. Tamar let her partner cook on the grill, but any other dishes and the organization of the barbecue were in her hands. For example, during her Passover barbecue, Deborah took the grilled meat to the kitchen, cut it, and served it before putting in on the table. Yet, one of the ways in which women were more able to influence their family and strengthen their roles was through the distribution of leftovers. Women used these leftovers not only to intervene in the lives of their children, but also to sustain the family hierarchy and for the transmission of identity. While studying orthodox Mizrahi women in Jerusalem, Susan Starr Seret found that, "When the women prepare traditional food for their married children, they consciously use food to strengthen their descendants' bonds to Judaism. Food, particularly in the framework of holiday and Shabbat meals, transmits traditional values. Food makes the individual feel Jewish, the smells, textures, and tastes of Jewish cooking, perhaps even more than books and

[32] Nir Avieli.2013. "Grilled nationalism" *Food, culture and society,* 16(2) p.301-320.

lessons, became inescapably embedded in the individual psyche."[33] This mechanism, used by secular and orthodox women alike, to strengthen the collective identity of the family becomes more noticeable when the partners of the younger generations are new immigrants, and mothers-in-law see the distribution of leftovers as a way to "correct" the diets of the new members of the family and the nation.

Furthermore, Friday night dinners, have an almost mandatory character, and the distribution of leftovers to grown up daughters and sons is a way through which women exert power. This, of course, is not a practice that is exclusive to the Israeli society. Carole M. Counihan researched this phenomenon in modern day Florence, and concluded that women in stratified societies use food distribution to exert power, understood as influence over the members of their families that is rarely used over other members of wider society.[34]

This mechanism to influence family life not only included the offering of cooked leftovers, but sometimes also gifts of raw ingredients that might bring a change in diets and food choices. Eliana, the American immigrant living in Beersheba mentioned in Chapter 5, has been deeply influenced by her mother-in-law. On the one hand, in the same way that her boyfriend did, she decided to stop keeping kosher as for the first time she saw herself as a legitimate member of the Jewish community. Yet, after her arrival in Israel, she also started to consume dishes different to those she used to eat in the United States. She said that her diet is not only healthier now, as she includes a lot of fresh and dairy products that she would not have tasted in the United States (such as cottage cheese), but she now also has a predilection for Mizrahi cooking: the food cooked by her mother-in-law. Eliana's mother-in-law cooks a copious dinner every Friday, with enough food for each of her children to take home and eat during the week. Not only that, she also buys groceries for her son and Eliana. Eliana has decided to let her do all of these things for them, as she claims it is her way to feel included and helpful. Although of Ashkenazi origin, Eliana has adopted all of the Farsi (Jewish Iranian) traditions of her family-in-law, and most of the food she consumes comes from her mother-in-law's kitchen. Eliana also says that one of the reasons she allows her mother-in-law to almost dictate her diet is the little control she thinks she has over other things: "she is

[33] Susan Starr Sered.1988. "Food and Holiness: Cooking as a sacred act among Middle Eastern Jewish Women" *Anthropology Quarterly.* 61 (3). p.133.
[34]Carole M. Counihan. 1988. "Female Identity, Food and Power in Contemporary Florence", *Anthropological Quarterly*. 16(2). P.53.

always in the kitchen, alone. Nobody helps her with anything. I think allowing her to cook for us is also a way to show appreciation for her and what she does. I also always try to help her out, but she doesn't seem to like it." According to Eliana, the only place in which her mother-in-law can exert power is in her kitchen, and she has been particularly keen to influence the way she eats.

Eliana's account is resonant with Carole M. Counihan's research. She contends that, "Giving food connects women to close relatives through an extremely intense emotional channel; women become identified with the food they offer. The mother determines when what and how much family members will eat. She controls the social mores of the table, which are a microcosm of behaviours and values deemed right and just by society-at-large. She controls the symbolic language of food, determining what her dishes and meals will say about herself, her family and the world."[35] Eliana's mother-in-law uses food not only to influence her diet, but also to explain who they are as a family and as a society to her.

For her part, Eliana does believe her in-laws have taught her how to eat like an Israeli. In reference to this, she said: "I used to hate cottage cheese, and it is everywhere here! They taught me how to eat it, and now I love it!" It is clear in this statement that her mother-in-law has become a key influence in the changes she has made to her diet, and is probably one of the main agents of her socialization. Eliana has learned how to eat like an Israeli from her mother-in-law, in this case like a Mizrahi Israeli, and she tries to do the same for other immigrants. If her mother-in-law had been Ashkenazi, it is likely that she would have a different understanding of how to behave and eat like an Israeli.

Yet, Eliana's mother was not the only one using the distribution of leftovers to promote a certain understanding of the Israeli diet and to absorb a newcomer into the family. Ayala, for example, also had great influence over the way her son-in-law eats, and she is really proud of this. Ayala believes that the freshness and quality of the products available in Israel make Israeli food "better, tastier and healthier." She never specified what she thought was better, but it was clear she believed it was healthier than her son-in-law's American diet. Ayala proudly told me she had managed to change his eating habits, and had not only integrated fresh food and salads into his diet, but had also given him a taste for visiting and shopping in markets. However, his son-in-law did say to me that he would still prefer some "unhealthy

[35] *Ibid*.p.54.

American food" over the Israeli salads, but he was trying to adapt to the country and did not want to disappoint his mother-in-law. Ayala was either unaware of this or ignored his comments. She perceived the changes in her son-in-law's diet as part of the process of Israelisation, and took pride in the part she had played in this change. However, other members of the family complained about him trying too hard to become Israeli, and that he denied his diasporic origins or did not understand clearly what it meant to be a secular Jew in Israel.

Similarly to Eliana's mother-in-law, Ayala became one of the main agents of socialization and nationalization of her son-in-law and, although she was proud of her success in changing his diet, she and her family were still not completely satisfied with him. For them, he was still far from acting like a "real Israeli" and they saw it as their job to continue this task. Ayala thought that one of the ways she could influence this change was through food and claimed the changes he had made already as a personal achievement. This was similar to the way that Eliana's mother-in-law exercised her influence through the distribution of leftovers, and her control over the Friday dinner. Even when she worked full-time she always found time to cook for her children, as she saw it not only as a way to guarantee that her family would see each other but also as an opportunity to transmit the main national values.

Conclusion

It seems impossible to talk about food without talking about women. Feeding others, especially family members is a female task in most societies and allows women to exert influence and power in the private sphere, both in traditional and modern societies. Women use food to bring their families together, to socialize newcomers and transmit tradition, to teach how to be national according to their own understanding of what this means. Therefore, although the literature in nationalism seems to forget them, they are key actors in our understanding of how national identity is performed, talked about, consumed, and chosen in the everyday lives of ordinary people.

Gender equality is a fundamental myth of the Israeli state. As mentioned in other chapters, the traditional religious role of women in Judaism focuses on the house, while men's religious duties are performed mainly in the synagogue. Women duties are related mostly, but not only, to food handling and preparation, and a proper understanding of kosher laws is key to these tasks. The centrality of female figures in the domestic sphere is reproduced not

only in orthodox families but also in the Israeli secular household. Senior women will take a dominant role over the rest of the family members, and they will exert a powerful influence over the lives of the younger members, both men and women.

Women's control over the private sphere, the matriarchal structure of families, and the predominance of strong maternal figures are some of the components of a myth that makes Israelis imagine their country as an equal gender paradise; this view is also reinforced by the female mandatory army service, as well as the impressive number of working mothers. Although men's role for the Kiddush is fundamental, the rest of the dinner, from the menu to the guest list, is under the control of women that oversee the shopping, preparing, and cooking of the dinner.

In the case of Israel, Friday night dinners are one of the weekly events that allow women to exercise this influence, which starts by choosing a menu. Ashkenazi and Mizrahi traditions, nostalgia versus innovation, and the desire to prove a connection to the Land of Israel, all play a fundamental role in the creation of the Israeli Shabbat menu.

Contrary to what happened in previous decades, the mixture of cultural experiences has now become a source of national pride and is visible on the Israeli Friday night table and in the lack of agreement on how an Israeli Shabbat menu should look. While roast chicken might be a common choice for Ashkenazi families, it is not uncommon to also find stir-fries and even sushi on their table. The choice of Asian food as a way to open culinary horizons might be related to the moral neutrality attached to those dishes, as there is virtually no historical relationship between Jewish communities and Asian countries. On the other hand, Mizrahi families continue reproducing their diaspora traditions with pride and will showcase their cuisines in the Shabbat dinner. However, there are some commonalities among most families: an abundance of salads and fresh vegetables, the presence of some Middle Eastern dishes like hummus, and some more universal dishes for the children like schnitzels and roast, or fried potatoes. Food is also served in the middle of the table, in huge portion for the whole family, and the dinner is more formal than other weekly meals. There are also two elements that are always present: challah and wine, which are indispensable for the Kiddush and the only items, together with the lighting of candles, that will mark the religious origins of the Friday dinner.

These menu choices, as well as the shopping, and cooking for Shabbat are still in the hands of women, and the organization of the meal reinforces the matriarchal structure of the

family, and allows women to exert influence over other family members. Shabbat, therefore, becomes one of the key moments in the weekly routine of a household in which newcomers, immigrants, and children are socialized into the country and taught how to talk, choose, perform and consume the nation. Shabbat shows newcomers how to pray and which roles each member of society has, which dishes people are allowed to eat during Friday night, and which is the acceptable space through which they can innovate or modify tradition. Women, as the main organizers of these dinners, become the agents of socialization, teaching the newcomers how to behave by reproducing their own understandings of the nation. Shabbat shows the predominance of female control in the private sphere of Israel and power relationships between different members of the family, especially between mothers-in-law and sons and daughters-in-law.

Shabbat is also a clear example of the ethnic, gender, class and religious divisions of the Israeli family. The choice of the Friday night menu showcases in the case of Mizrahi family, the pride that certain family recipes contain. On the other hand, in Ashkenazi traditions, the willingness to experiment and the shortage of family recipes show the observer the broken chain of culinary traditions. This is due to historical persecution and the Holocaust, as well as the conviction that although the European diet was intended to be the official Israeli diet, it lacks flavour and variety compared to the Middle Eastern and Sephardic Jewish gastronomic traditions. Through Shabbat dinners the boundaries of the Israeli nation, as well as the ethnic communities and the social divisions inside it, are reasserted but also the matriarchal family structure is reinforced.

In this chapter, I discussed several cases in which Friday dinners are used to socialize new immigrants. In the examples presented, although female figures (mothers-in-law) try to influence the way the new members of the family eat, the immigrants do not act as static receptacles of culture, but as active and dynamic participants. They negotiate through everyday practices what is taught to them, to then reshape and negotiate what it means to behave and eat as an Israeli. In all of the cases explored, the home becomes the scenario in which people are taught how to consume the nation. Furthermore, as Tim Edensor points out, in these scenarios the home becomes a space of both repression and freedom in which external influences are adapted through housework.[36] Women, the main actors in the home,

[36] Tim Enderson, op. cit, p.58-61.

use this scenario in different ways, where, particularly through cooking, they become the main characters in the process of becoming a nation. Therefore, the study of Israeli cuisine and in particular of Shabbat food traditions provides us with a view of how women contribute to the creation of national identity, especially in the private sphere. It also allows us to see that even when most women work full-time outside the home, the Israeli state and society still conceives their role as mothers and feeders as the fundamental way in which they contribute to the creation and reproduction of the nation.

Chapter 7. "They might be our enemies, but they sure know how to cook"

The University of Haifa sits on the top of Mount Carmel. The huge campus includes student accommodation, where the residents are mostly foreigners, with a few Israelis and some Palestinian and Druze students from villages close to Haifa. In the middle of the student halls, there is a patio, a mini market and a *moadon,* a multi-purpose room where different activities take place, from aerobics to homework clubs and Sabbath dinners. The *moadon* is also a bar at night, where cheap food and alcoholic drinks are served all week after 8pm. Lots of students take advantage of the bar and spend a couple of hours drinking and chatting on the patio. On one of those occasions, I met Aisha, a Palestinian accountancy student who lived in the halls and worked in the university branch of the Israeli café named *Aroma.*

Aisha was around 20 years old when I met her and was a lively and chatty woman who was always interested in meeting foreigners and speaking to them in English. Aisha was Muslim, and although she did not consider herself "too observant" she chose to use the hijab to distinguish herself from Jewish Israeli girls. "The hijab is a new thing for me, is not about religion. I wear it because I got tired of Israelis thinking I'm Jewish because of my fair skin and my good pronunciation of Hebrew. I'm not Jewish; I am Palestinian". Aisha was proud of her Hebrew that had been crucial in being admitted to a good university[1] like Haifa. She was educated in Arabic and her parents do not speak Hebrew, so she had to learn Hebrew in the streets and through television. Although she considers herself a Palestinian she has Israeli nationality and therefore an ID card that says she is an Arab-Israeli. Most students of the Ulpan enjoyed practicing Hebrew with Aisha, as she was good at grammar and did not speak as quickly as the Jewish Israelis.

Aisha quickly became popular among the Ulpan students, and she was constantly talking to us and telling us about her job and studies. Aisha and I talked a lot as she was interested in my dissertation and willing to help. She wanted to take me to her mother's house to eat real Palestinian food, but she never did. She did not give a reason for this; she just stopped inviting me. Some of the students said it was not a good idea to go to a Palestinian house, as it could be dangerous for me, a Jewish woman, to go to a place in which "we are not wanted". These comments were in fact interesting, as Aisha never saw me as a Jewish woman; she was only

[1] According to Aisha, Hebrew is a requirement to being admitted to any of the top Israeli Universities, like Haifa University. As most Arab-Israelis attend schools that only teach Arabic it is not easy for them to access these universities.

curious about my being Mexican, and why I wanted to know more about shakshuka. Whatever the reason behind the change of plans, our conversations continued as always.

One night, as I was sitting with some of the Ulpan students in the patio, Aisha arrived and started talking about her work in the café. We then began discussing the menu of the Israeli chain, and she made clear to me that she did not feel uncomfortable working there. She thought that most of the food was "standard coffee shop food" and was proud that *Aroma* was opening stores in different countries. Aisha was under the impression that the chain was American and not Israeli, when I told her that as far as I knew the owners were Israeli she answered me she couldn't see anything too Israeli on the menu. I pointed out that chopped vegetable salad with tahini or shakshuka for breakfast was not standard American breakfast and that they might be considered Israeli dishes. She then laughed and said to me: "I do not understand what you mean by Israeli food, that does not exist! How can you be studying something that doesn't exist? They eat our food and their food from Europe, but there is no such thing as Israeli food. There is Palestinian food, so the food in *Aroma* is the food of this land, Palestinian food, Israeli salad is Arab salad! And if they want to think otherwise, they can be my guest!" Some other students intervened in the conversation and told Aisha that if there was no Israeli food, there was no Palestinian food either, as both nations did not exist a century ago. Aisha answered "if you want to call hummus Arab food instead of Palestinian food as you do with us, it's fine for me. However, the truth is we have been cooking this food for longer than you so it is ours, not yours".

Aisha's claim of ownership over the local food was not a surprise for me, it is well-known by Israelis that, in their own words, "they stole" most of their food, not only from the local population but from the countries from which they came. Aisha saw shakshuka and other dishes as standard local food, imagining that this was simply the way people ate in the region. However, her problem was in labelling it as Israeli, when her family had been cooking those dishes for longer. She saw Israelis as Europeans, as foreigners with no real connection to the land. Her denial of the existence of Israeli food mirrored her beliefs about Israelis themselves: although they eat like locals they do not belong here. Therefore she found my research topic odd, as she was convinced there was no such thing as Israeli cuisine. And she was not the only one that believed this. Some of my Jewish participants shared with her the skepticism about "Israeli food" being something that existed and that was worthy of academic inquiry. Others simply said, "there is Israeli food, but we do not know exactly what it is" or "we are on our way

to find out what it is, we are still a young country". Behind the doubts about the existence of Israeli food, most of them highlighted the influence of Levantine food, Ashkenazi food, Mizrahi food and local food, although nobody acknowledge the influence of Palestinian food. Most of them said they did not know what Palestinians ate as they hadn't been in a Palestinian restaurant or in a Palestinian house. The silence and denial of the influence of Palestinian food affected me deeply, and therefore I will devote this chapter to the analysis of it.

In this chapter I will argue that the process through which Israeli food culture was created was not a simple melting pot process as the pioneers wanted. On the contrary, it was a process of creolization, a violent clash between different cultures, that had nothing smooth or simple about it. As has been mentioned in previous chapters, every Jewish community arrived with a food culture of their own, and clashed not only with the culinary traditions of other Jewish groups but also with the impositions of the government. But the food of the immigrants was not the only one that became part of the Israeli diet; local food, mainly Palestinian, also was part of this blending. Therefore, in this chapter I not only give my attention to Mizrahi food but I also focus on the place Palestinian food has in the culinary repertoire of Israel. I will describe the influence of both culinary traditions as well as how Palestinian food has been de-nationalized and appropriated in order to become eatable and good for Jewish Israelis to consume. Nowadays, accepting there is such a thing as Palestine food would imply the acceptance of the existence of a Palestinian nation, suggesting that the consumption and mentioning of Palestine food by Jewish Israelis has become a clear sign of their political preferences/stances, positions, and convictions.

Finally, I will also sustain that one of the common substitutes for the label Palestinian food became Mizrahi food, as if giving it a Jewish label made it more easily accepted. Talking about Mizrahi food obscures and hides the Arab origin of some dishes by imposing a Jewish denominator, but also denies the possibility for Middle Eastern Jews of being simultaneously Jewish and Arab.

To develop the arguments presented above I will firstly explain the term creolization and how Middle Eastern food and Jewish Middle Eastern became known as Mizrahi. I will highlight the different ways in which the Palestinian and Arab influences in Israeli food culture are talked about, silenced or disguised, and how these have become a key element in the formation of

Israel national identity. This process affects both Palestinian and Jewish Israeli foodways, and it is closer to the process of creolization described by Richard Wilk than a peaceful melting pot.[2]

Melting pot or creolization?

As mentioned in the first chapters, the construction of the nation requires the highlighting of cultural and historical ties among its population. In the case of Israel, finding those cultural ties that united them represented one of the great challenges faced by the Zionists. Their aim was not only to prove their connection to the land but also to strengthen the cultural and identity connections between the Jewish communities that were immigrating from everywhere in Europe and, later on, from the Middle East. These ties, although not necessarily static or unchangeable, proved to be fundamental for the development of the nation.

Zionism also had the aim of leaving the European experience in the past. The obsession with building a "New Hebrew" became the basis upon which Israeli identity was constructed. The first Jewish immigrants to Palestine developed a deep admiration for the "native population" who, before becoming a threat, developed into a source of inspiration for the newcomers. The foodways of Palestinians and of the Bedouins were imitated by the pioneers who saw in their diets the "proper" way to eat and cook in their new land[3] . The Jewish settlers left in the past their diets and adopted the customs of the locals. As Ichijo and Ranta describe the diet of the new Israeli became one "rich in fruits, fresh vegetables and dairy products rather than the Jewish Eastern European diet of fish, meat and boiled vegetables. The inspiration for many of the new dishes and food ingredients comes from imitating and adapting elements from the local Arab-Palestinian food culture. In Zionist discourse, the role and importance of Arab-Palestinian food were marginalised and forgotten. At the heart of this change was the presumption of European cultural superiority. In a way, although Zionism was based on the negation of Jewish diaspora life in Europe, it still perceived itself as a European movement. The pioneers found in food a tool for constructing a new strong and self-sufficient Hebrew identity which denied what was seen as the weak, passive Jews of the Ghetto".[4]

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[2] See Richard Wilk. 2006. *Home Cooking in the Global Village, Caribbean Food from Buccaneers to Ecotourists*, Oxford-New York: Berg.

[3] Zeynep Sertbulut. 2012. " The culinary state: On Politics of Representation and identity Identity in Israel" *HAGAR Studies in Culture, Policy and Identities*, 10(2) p. 55.

[4] Atsuko Ichijo and Ronal Rant. 2016. *Food, National Identity and Nationalism*, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. p.98.

The relationship between Israelis and the Palestinians, the Arab Jews, and the Middle East became part of this complex relationship of admiration, on one hand, and desire to substitute them on the other. On one side, Israeli Jews believed Ashkenazi Jews were more civilized than the Palestinians and than Middle Eastern Jews, and therefore their culture should be preserved as the dominant one in Israel. On the other hand, since the first waves of Jewish immigration to Palestine, there had been an attempt to imitate the local ways which revealed the admiration the pioneers had for the native population and the desire to prove that their connection to the land was as strong or stronger than the Palestinian one.[5]

This desire further complicated the relationship between Palestinians and Jews even before the establishment of the State. As mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3, the first task confronted by the European Zionists in their attempt to build a new nation in Mandate Palestine was to construct a unique collective identity that highlighted the connection not only between the land and their new inhabitants but among the different Jewish communities that were arriving in their Old-New Homeland. The task was not easy, as hundreds of years in the diaspora had left few connections among the immigrants themselves and with the land. Their diets and food preferences were diverse and dissimilar: the diet of Polish Jews had nothing in common with the diet of Yemenite Jews, and even between Jews from the same areas hierarchy and class differences were visible in their cooking practices. It was only dietary religious restrictions that marked some common food trends between the population. They were also unfamiliar with the ingredients available in their new land. Hence, the Zionist establishment used different tactics to homogenize the population and to create a New Hebrew man that would leave the weak diasporic Jew in the past. To achieve this, the elites followed a melting pot ideal which was supposed to guide the peaceful mix of all the cultural trends of the Jewish population and to help build a new identity. This ideal of the melting pot allowed Israelis to anchor themselves in the Middle East while simultaneously continue to consider themselves "modern, Western, and superior Europeans".[6]

This meant that although in theory the melting pot implies a mixing of cultures, in Israel it mostly implied the Europeanization of immigrants from the Middle East and Africa. Mizrahi Jewish culture was believed to be backwards and therefore it needed to be altered so that it fit

[5] *Loc. cit.*

[6] Nir Avieli, 2017. *Food and Power: A culinary Ethnography of Israel.* Oakland:University of California Press. p.11.

in with the civilizing aims of the new country. The mix also ignored the Arab local population who, although admired by the first Jewish pioneers, by the 1950s was considered threatening.

Therefore, the process by which local Arab food became not only edible but a fundamental part of the national food culture in Israel does not respond to the image of a painless and peaceful melting pot. Arjun Appadurai affirms that "especially in the culinary matter, the melting pot is a myth."[7] A simple, peaceful mix of local ingredients and European culinary knowledge never took place in Israel, not even among the Jewish population. Immigrants did not forget their food traditions: some of them even despised the dishes of the others, it was not easy for them to adopt some ingredients, and sometimes it was complicated to get others. Although the Zionist authorities' aim was to disconnect the Jewish economy and culture from the Palestinian one, eventually Palestinian food, and not only local ingredients, became part of the culinary culture of Israel.

This complicated path by which local Arab food was nationalized by Israel responds better to the idea of creolization than to the metaphor of melting pot. The term *creole* has been used since the 16th century to denominate the offspring of European colonizers born in America during the colonial period.[8] Particularly popular among scholars and intellectuals of the Caribbean, it was not exclusively used in this region and, although with several different meanings, it was used through the American colonies in general.[9] Ulf Hannerz, recognises the possibility of using the term outside of the cultures of the New world, in a more generic and less geographically specific way.[10] Hannerz affirms, that in this generic use of the term "it stands opposed to the view of cultures as well-bounded wholes, as well as to assumptions of a replication of uniformity within them. It suggests that the flow of culture between countries and continents may result in another diversity of culture, based more on interconnections than on autonomy".[11] Aisha Khan also points out, the term creolization as it is used nowadays "has to do with the nature of cultural change, the expressions and consequences of "cultural encounters among diverse groups within certain regimes of power, and the character of, and

[7] Arjun Appadurai. 1988. "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, p.22.
[8] Charles Stewart "Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory". In Charles Stewart [ed]. 2007. *Creolization, History, Ethnography, Theory*. California: Left Coast Press. p.1
[9] *Ibid.* p.5
[10] Ulz Hannerz. 1996. *Transnational connections*. New York and London: Routledge. p.66.
[11] Ulz Hannerz, 1992. *Cultural Complexity. Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning.* New York: Columbia University Press. p.265

relationships among particular social formations, notably regions and nation-states. Manifestations of the creolization concept have come in the form of such varied concepts as plural societies, miscegenation and more recently hybridity and multiculturalism"[12].

Khan, as well as Hannerz highlights the importance of cultural variety and exchange embedded in the process of creolization. Hannerz, when refereing to this cultural exchange between periphery and central cultures also discusses what he calls a *creative interplay* by which the periphery can talk back to the centre and not only absorb the culture of the centre.[13]

The term creolization is not commonly used to talk about food, but has been applied to the descriptions of other cultural encounters. Nonetheless, Richard Wilk applies the term to the case of Belize's food culture and describes it as "hardly a smooth blending process. Instead, it was work, compounded of appropriation and resistance, full of ambivalence and ambiguity." [14] Wilks' emphasis on the violent aspects of the concept of creolization is fundamental for applying it to Israel. Arguably, this process has included t Hannerz's *creative* play that has allowed Palestinians and Israelis, particularly restaurant entrepreneurs, to "talk back" to the centre, by "carving a niche" in the Israeli food market.[15] But, as I will argue in this chapter, this by no means implies there is a peaceful culinary melting pot.

It is therefore much more appropriate to talk about a creolization process in Israel rather than a melting pot one. It is clear that the process through which Israeli food culture was invented was not smooth or simple. On the contrary, creolization is a perfect reflection of the political situation of the country; a situation of constant conflict not only between Palestinians and Jews but among different groups within the Israeli society. The dream of a melting pot where the local population would simply adopt the customs of the newcomers and accept their presence gratefully never happened. The process was a violent one in which ingredients, lands and people were substituted, exchanged, appropriated and nationalized. It was, and still is, through creolization that everyday dishes like hummus or falafel traditionally eaten by the local population became politicized and a source of conflict.

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[12] Aisha Khan, "Creolization Moments" In Charles Stewart [ed]. 2007. *Creolization, History, Ethnography, Theory.* California: Left Coast Press. p.237.
[13] Ulz Hannerz.1996.*Transnational connections. Op. cit.* p.67.
[14] Richard Wilk. 2006. *Home Cooking in the Global Village, Caribbean Food from Buccaneers to Ecoturists*. Oxford-New York: Berg. p.109.
[15] Ulz Hannerz.1996.*Transnational connections. Op. cit.* p.73.

Creolization implied the denationalization and subsequent appropriation of some Palestinian dishes and recipes by Israelis. One of the ways in which this took place was by simply changing their label from Palestinian to Mizrahi, making them edible and good by adding Jewish character. In the subsection below, I will concentrate in the origins of Mizrahi food in Israel.

What is Mizrahi food?

As has been shown throughout this dissertation, Israel is not a monolithic society and within it there are several divisions which constitute the cultural mosaic of the country. These groups which constitute the nation, and the way they imagine and understand the nation, are in constant competition, making the nation, as mentioned in the introduction, a zone of conflict.[16] This conflict is not only reflected through political competition but in everyday life, in which simple things like food choices reflect belonging to a certain group and a particular understanding of the nation.

One of the most important characteristics that divides, and fragments Israeli society is ethnicity. But there is not only one clear division, there are several of them. The most prominent one is between Jews and non-Jews, but even among the Jewish population the ethnic division is visible. Ashkenazim and Mizrahim are the main groups used in Israel to classify the Jewish population, and although some Israelis consider it not to be important, this ethnic differentiation is still a controversial topic that has visible consequences.

The term Mizrahim began to be used in the 1990s by left-wing Israeli activists and it eventually substituted the term Sephardim.[17] Mizrahi Jews had been part of the social life of the region since they were expelled from Spain in 1492 and welcomed by the Ottoman Empire. They had assimilated to their countries and had been a minority in them for centuries. European Jews were the core of the Zionist movement and quickly became the elite of the Jewish community in Mandate Palestine. Apart from the Palestinian Jews, the first Mizrahi Jews to arrive in Israel between 1910 and 1914 were 2,000 Yemenite Jews recruited by European pioneers to substitute cheap Arab labour.[18] The Mizrahi population continued to grow before 1948 with the arrival of Kurdish and Iranian Jews, and after the establishment of Israel with

[16] Atsuko Ichijo and Ronald Ranta *op. cit*. p.43.

[17] Ella Shohat. 1999. "The Invention of the Mizrahim", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 29 (1). pp.5-20.

[18] Joseph Massad. 1996. "Zionism's Internal Others: Israel and the Oriental Jews", *Journal of Palestine Studies,* 25(4) p.54.

millions of Jews who had to leave their countries as a consequence of the establishment of the new state.[19]

The Mizrahi Jews were perceived by the European Jews as different and "backwards", which is why their migration and absorption into the country became a complicated and painful process.[20]. Ashkenazi Jews identified Mizrahi Jews and Arabs as similar and "actively block their social ascendance by tagging them as Oriental and hence cultureless and inferior".[21]

Not only were they seen as backwards but also as less national as the country was oriented to the West and to European cultural traditions. Michael Skey affirms that: "Within the bounded national territory, different groups are perceived to be more or less national than others. Those groups who possess greater national cultural capital in relation to a whole host of sanctified and valued social and physical cultural styles and dispositions are able to position themselves (and are recognised) as the legitimate arbiters of values, norms and social practices within the nation."[22] In the case of Israelis those groups perceived as less national were, and of course continue to be, the Arab Israelis, but also those Jewish communities who did not share the values and traditions of the European Elite: the Mizrahim, the Indians and the Ethiopians.

The invention of Mizrahi cuisine is also a recent phenomenon that mirrors the painful history of the Mizrahi community in Israel. Nir Avieli defines it as "the outcome of a process whereby the varied Jewish cuisines of many cultural regions in North Africa and the Middle East were stripped of their uniqueness and complexity and simplified into a limited set of emblematic dishes, cooking techniques, spices, aromas and tastes."[23]

The conglomerate of cuisines now known in Israel as Mizrahi food is the predominant one in Israel. Although in the decades after the establishment of the Israeli state Mizrahi food culture was perceived as unhealthy and backwards, as time went by it became greatly appreciated. There are several reasons for this. Comparing Ashkenazi food and Mizrahi food, the latter is richer in flavours and ingredients than the former, a food culture born from poverty, scarcity and persecution.[24] Mizrahi food is a reflection of the much more comfortable situation

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[19] *Ibid.* p.55.

[20] Dan Bar-On. 2008 *The Other within Us: Constructing Jewish-Israeli identity,* New York: Cambridge University Press, p.14.

[21] Nir Avieli.2018. *Op. cit.,* p.63

[22] Michael Skey. 2011. *National Belonging and Everyday Life,* New York-Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. p.29.

[23] Nir Avieli, 2018. *Op. cit.,* p.107.

[24] Claudia Roden. 2002." Jewish Food in the Middle East" in Sami Zubaida and Richard Tapper [ed] *A Taste of Thyme,* London: Tauris Parker. p.154.

in which the Jewish communities of the Middle East lived, especially if compared with their counterparts in Europe. The abundance of meat dishes and labour-intensive cooking techniques mirror their history but was also the reason it was believed to be unhealthy. Mizrahi cooks adopted and adapted the food traditions of the societies that received them, substituting some ingredients to make them kosher and using festive traditional dishes for Jewish celebrations.

Mizrahi traditional food was preserved in Israel even when it was seen as a symbol of poor adaptation to the new Israeli society. Mizrahim were more familiar with the ingredients available in the country and their culinary knowledge had been transmitted without considerable breaks for centuries. But Mizrahi food was not only kept as a family tradition; it soon became a source of income. Mizrahi entrepreneurs opened the doors of cheap and abundant restaurants that eventually became one of the characteristics of the food culture of the country. Yemenite Jews opened falafel stands and Iraqi Jews are still selling the popular *sabih*.[25] On the other hand, Ashkenazi food, once the standard Israeli food and the dominant one in institutions; was left aside only for holidays, becoming a nostalgic narrative for the lost world of Europe.[26]

This appreciation of Mizrahi food over Ashkenazi food can be seen as another symptom of the slow process of orientalization of the country. As Claudia Roden affirms, "while the culture of Sephardic Jews is belittled in Israel, their cooking predominates. This orientalization of food is a reality which has not quite become accepted".[27] This process, which is of course part of the creolization process, has not only implied a rise in the popularity of Mizrahi cuisine but also of Palestinian dishes. However, these latter dishes are almost never recognised by their national origin and are commonly confused with Mizrahi food or simply labelled as Middle Eastern. Even when Mizrahi food seems to be more national, it is labelled as "ethnic" while Ashkenazi food is classified as Jewish. This mirrors both the Zionist discourse and the Arab nationalist discourse which equates Jewishness with the European experience, while making it

[26] Liora Gvion .2015. "Two Narratives of Israeli Food "Jewish" versus "Ethnic"" in A. Helman. *Jews and their foodways*, 2015, New York: Oxford University Press. Loc. 4464.

[27] Claudia Roden, *op. cit.* p.155.

incompatible with Arabness and denying Mizrahim the possibility of being both Jewish and Arab.[28]

This denial of the Arab roots of Mizrahim becomes especially interesting when we look at the food culture of the country: on one hand, in order to become acceptable and edible Palestinian food had to be de-nationalized. On the other hand, Mizrahi food is not considered as Jewish as Ashkenazi food, and therefore is labelled as ethnic, although it is the more popular cuisine in the country, and therefore, we could even say, more national. This ambivalent attitude towards Mizrahi food and culture in general is repeated in every aspect of Israeli social and political life. Mizrahi music, pronunciation and culture in general although not openly labelled backwards any more, are still considered less valuable than the Western equivalents. This ambivalent attitude is also reflected in cookbooks, which show us how this problematic culinary relationship began even before the establishment of the State of Israel.

Cookbooks

The conflict within Israeli identity and the process of its formation is reflected in the gastronomic history of the country, that is best recorded in its cookbooks. From the very beginning of Israeli gastronomic history, the influence of Palestinian food is hidden, and although there are constant remarks about the importance of cooking and eating with local ingredients, the people who cook with these ingredients are not revealed to the readers. These cookbooks were part of an orientalist discourse that identified the natives with tradition and therefore with a stronger connection to the land.[29] The pioneers, with the desire not only to prove their own connection to the land but of substituting the native population for a Jewish population, appropriated dishes and cooking techniques that they learned from this native population, who were admired but also silenced. Even when discussing Arab dishes, authors decided to "de-Palestinize" them and simply call them "Oriental dishes." In some cases, Arab food was presented as Mizrahi food or Biblical food, highlighting the Jewish connection to Israeli land and denying the existence of another community living in the same territory. However, not only the Arab origins of food have been erased, but also the Arab origins of the

[28] *Loc. cit.*

[29] Dafna Hirsh, "Hummus is best when is Fresh and Made by the Arabs", *op. cit,* p.624.

Mizrahi population who, although speaking with nostalgia about their places of origin, will draw a line dividing them from their co-national Muslims.

Cookbooks like *How to Cook in Palestine* by Dr. Erna Meyer, mentioned in the first chapter, reflected the way Ashkenazi pioneers saw themselves and the diet of the locals.[30] What is fascinating for the contemporary reader of this cookbook is the open disdain she has for the European diet, which she constantly belittles, pointing out not only how unhealthy it is but how many hours of work it requires from housewives. Astonishingly, however, she only suggests substituting some of the ingredients used in European cooking with local ones, but does not advise changing the structure of the meals or even the recipes. For example, she advocates changing butter for olive oil, as the locals do, and recommends using local vegetables and less meat. Nonetheless, although she praises the quality of the products available, and constantly suggests cooking techniques to preserve their nutrients - with the exception of a recipe for Turkish coffee - none of the recipes included in the book are distinctively Middle Eastern.[31] Recipes like chopped liver, a traditional Ashkenazi dish are still suggested, but cooked with aubergine instead of liver.[32] Although Dr. Meyer constantly talks about local ingredients she never talks about local people. Nonetheless, at the end of the book the reader can find an advertisement that reminds the housewives of the importance of only buying products made by Jewish hands, therefore undermining the existence of other options like buying cheap agricultural products made by Palestinians.[33]

Another recipe book which allows us to explore the contradictions embedded in the aim of creating a new Jewish identity in Israel is the book written by Lilian Cornfeld and titled *Israeli Cookery*. Although Cornfeld explores the culinary traditions of some of the Jewish communities established in Israel, she never talks about the Arab population. She tells her readers:

> In the gathering of exiles from scores of different communities, from all corners of the earth, each reflects in their food and culture their country of origin. Many have never heard of eggplant or seen an olive. While most Europeans dislike sesame oil and burghul, the immigrants from the Middle Eastern countries cannot understand the excitement over

[30] Dr Erna Meyer. 1937. *How to Cook in Palestine*, Tel Aviv: WIZO.

[31] The book does include recipes for stuffed vegetables but they are not only common in Middle Eastern cuisine but also in Ashkenazi cuisine.

[32] Dr Erna Meyer. *Loc. cit.*

[33] *Ibid.* p.122.

borscht, gefilte fish and herring or what the Western world thinks are typically Jewish foods. In attempting to improve the living standards of Israel's heterogeneous population by teaching modern food habits, nutritionists have encountered many cultural barriers. They have to cope with a traditional dislike for milk, with ritual and lives attached to a certain item of food.[34]

Cornfeld aims to show her readers the diversity of dishes that can be found in Israel, and encourages them to try new recipes and adopt some of the most nutritious ones. She, in the same way as Dr. Erna Meyer, advices her audience to consume local ingredients and highlights the preference the Israeli population has for "Oriental food." She labels ingredients like bulgur, lentils, chickpeas and labneh as Oriental. But again, she does not talk about the people who consumed them.[35] She does not believe Israeli food to be Middle Eastern or European and points out that:

> Sabra [Israeli] cooking is not entirely the Middle East, nor is it European Jewish. One finds kugel and tzimmes, latkes and borscht on the menus with pilaffs, , koftas, and goulash. In many cases, they have become an Israeli dish of one type or another. In common is a love for a meat soup with rice or noodles, eggplant in all forms, salad *hamoutzim* [aubergines], lamb shashlik or a kebab on spit, houmous, tahini, falafel, cottage cheese and labneh in countless combinations.[36]

Although recognising the Arab influence in Sephardic food she still does not label it as Arabic, and talks about an "Oriental menu" instead.[37] Lilian Cornfeld's book, although written in 1962, still shows us the importance given by the State of Israel to creating an identity distinct from the Jewish diasporic identity. But it also shows the unwillingness to be called Middle Eastern, even when there is a constant need to reaffirm the connection between the Jewish immigrant and the land, and the vagueness with which the Arab-Jewish identity was and is still treated.

The conflicting relationship with the Palestinian and Arab food continues, and as the next section will illustrate with ethnographic data, Israelis constantly move between culinary admiration for "Arab food" while simultaneously talking about it with fear.

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[34] Lilian Cornfeld, 1962. *Israeli cookery*, Connecticut: The Avi Publishing Company, Inc, p.VII.
[35] *Ibid* p.VIII.
[36] *Loc. Cit.*
[37] *Ibid.*p.25.

Eating the food of the enemy

As I previously described in Chapter 4, I spent Passover lunch with Deborah, a South African immigrant who was my neighbour for some time. Deborah had lived most of her life in Israel. However, she was always in contact with *olim hadashim*, especially for South Africa, and opened her house to anybody that she met. In her house, the language spoken was English and, on some occasions, French. The immigrants in the reunions she organized spoke with nostalgia about their countries of origin, though they constantly emphasised how violent they had become in recent years and pointed out that insecurity was the main reason they had decided to move to Israel. Issues related to security, racism, and discrimination were always at the forefronts of their minds and were constantly talked about. The Passover lunch was only a few weeks after the 2015 elections, in which Benjamin Netanyahu was re-elected as Prime Minister of Israel. Most of the people invited by Deborah agreed that Netanyahu was the only candidate prepared to oversee the well-being of Israelis. For Deborah's family and friends, the "well-being" of Israeli citizens and Jews in the diaspora was related directly to security and protection from the Iranian nuclear threat, and from the Arab people in general.

The conversations during lunch also centred around security and the elections, and people started engaging in political discussions soon after they arrived. The atmosphere was not tense, as most people agreed on the importance of security and manifested their distrust towards their Arab neighbours and Iran. Criticisms around education levels, fears about terrorism and Islamic fundamentalist groups filled the conversations, and the high level of mistrust that they had towards Arabs was noticeable. However, at some point in the conversation, Deborah's husband Ben stopped the others and decided to talk about Arab food, by saying "Well they might not like us at all, but they definitely know how to cook." After his statement, long discussions about where to find the best kebab in Israel and how good the hummus was the closer you get to the border with Syria took place, and people gave suggestions of other places to try kebabs, or where to find good Arab butchers.

I noticed that Ben and his guest used the adjective "Arab" to refer to any non-Jewish citizen of Israel, as well as any enemy country of the region, including Iran, which he saw as the deadliest and most dangerous enemy. Simultaneously, I noticed that Iranian Jewish food was talked about and label as "Farsi food" as this could make it "kosher" and broke the relationship with its nation of origin.

Ben's suggestions and conversations showed the ambiguity in the relationship between Arabs and Israelis, and the mistrust between both communities which finds its everyday expression in the way Israelis consume and talk about Arab and Palestinian food. This conflicting relationship between Israelis and the food of the Arabs and the Middle East in general is also rooted in an Orientalist discourse. This discourse affirms that the only good thing that can be found in Lebanon or Syria is food, negating any possibility of sympathy between these groups of people.[38]

What is interesting about this point is that, although the arguments of Sidney W. Mintz and Christine M. Du Bois affirm that "Food serves both to solidify group membership and to set groups apart. Ethnicity is born of acknowledged difference and works through contrast."[39] is well-known and sustained by many academics, in the case of Israel, although food is used to set groups apart, the cuisine of the enemy is appreciated and eaten on an everyday basis. It appears that the national identity of Israel has been built by using and appropriating cultural elements of the "other" which is mainly considered a deadly enemy. This ambiguity, expressed in the comments made by Deborah's husband, is the result of a national identity built on the appropriation and renaming of cultural elements of the native Palestinian population, and by denying the Arab origins of an important part of the Jewish population of Israel. The relationship Ben and his guests have with their Arab neighbours and Palestinian citizens is not only one of enmity and disdain. On the contrary, it is a relationship embedded in an orientalist discourse that highlights the Arab connection with the region and with traditions they admire and consume on an almost daily basis.

This complex relationship, part of the creolization process, is not only visible in Israeli food culture but also in the diet of Palestinians. It is not rare to see Arab families in Haifa eating in the restaurant *Fatoush* (marketed as an Arab restaurant) and ordering schnitzels, traditionally perceived as a Jewish Israeli dish. I also witnessed while staying in the dorms of the University of Haifa that the female Arab students sharing the flat with me preferred to eat industrial Israeli hummus bought at the supermarket or the minimarket in the University. Aisha, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, told me that although she thought the traditional Palestine hummus had a better flavour, most people were brought up eating the Israeli version

[38] Dafna Hirsh.2011. *op. cit,* p.625.

[39] Sidney W. Mintz and Christine M. Du Bois. 2002."The Anthropology of Food and Eating" *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 31, p.109.

as it was convenient and easy to find everywhere. *Bamba,* a peanut based snack similar to Cheetos, as well as other Israeli industrialized snacks and salads like aubergines with mayonnaise or tomatoes were also consumed by Arab students in the dorms. In this regard, Ichijo and Ranta explain that "It is clear that Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel have to a certain extent adopted and acquired Jewish-Israeli food items, dishes, and eating habits. The Israelisation of Arab-Palestinian food culture is partly related to the dominance of Jewish Israeli food items, dishes and eating habits, food companies and media, but also to the impact of modernization and globalisation".[40] Palestinian students also frequented the *Aroma* café at the university as well as McDonald's and other fast food establishments on the campus, including Chinese food, "homemade" food, and a standard sandwich and salads restaurant. Even when the choice of going off campus to buy food always existed, finding Palestinian or Druze products like artisanal hummus implied a long journey, and therefore it was more convenient, at least during the week, to buy the food available on the campus.

The products available on the campus and their variety were chosen with a Jewish population in mind. Kosher food was easy available, as well as microwave ovens designed to heat meat and dairy products separately. I never saw any advertisements for halal food. While the Jewish population of Israel, as the colonizer, has been able to decide which dishes to adopt from the native culture, while Palestinians have not. Palestinian consumption of Israeli products is a reflection of the options available to them, of convenience and circulation of goods. For example if the Palestinian students living in the dorms of Haifa wish to buy food in the mini market at the university they cannot choose between Israeli and Palestinian or Lebanese hummus (as the American students in the United States can), and unless they want to make a trip to the centre of the city or to neighbouring Druze towns and buy a more expensive artisanal option they have to buy the Israeli products that are widely available. This is also the case in the West Bank where, according to a Palestinian informant, although fresh products are cheaper than in Israel, Israeli processed food are the easiest products to find and sometimes the only ones.

Still, although used to buying Israeli food in supermarkets, the students I talked to in Haifa were not familiar with traditional Ashkenazi cuisine, and said they did not know what Jewish Israelis ate at their house. The students with whom I shared a flat in the halls brought food from

[40] Ichijo and Ranta, *op. cit,* p.57.

home every weekend that included stuffed vegetables, soups, lamb stews and tabbouleh as well as cheese produced in their towns. They mixed these traditional dishes with store-bought products that they bought at the mini market or at the supermarkets in town. They did not perceive these products as representative of Israeli food, and they insisted they did not actually know what Israelis ate apart from Arabic food. The ignorance that both Palestinian and Israelis have for the home cooking of the other is a widespread phenomenon which easily reflects the lack of personal connection existing between both communities. Palestinian street food like hummus or falafel are staples of the Israeli diet, while Israeli industrialized products have a space in the Palestinian cupboard. However, it is only in recent years that Jewish Israelis have decided to taste Palestinian food and look beyond street food or the standard Levantine cuisine. Conversations about and naming Palestinian food among left-wing Israelis are also part of this phenomenon.

Naming Palestinian food

In recent years, chefs, cookbook writers and Israelis in general, particularly on the left of the political spectrum, have started to look for Palestinian food and develop a new taste for what they believe is an unknown cuisine. This has also meant that for the first time Israelis are talking about Palestinian food. Chefs and restaurant owners have played a big part in the inclusion of Palestinian food in the culinary vocabulary of Israelis, but the term is still controversial, even among Palestinian chefs in Israel.[41] When talking with a Palestinian citizen of Israel,[42] he pointed out to me that although it is true that Israelis have started to talk about Palestinian food, and restaurateurs are now labelling their food as Palestinian, the Palestinian owners of Arab restaurants in Israel are still not willing to change the label of their business, as they are afraid of losing a section of their Israeli customers if they read this as a political statement.

Jon E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss affirmed that "Nationhood is not only lurking in the crevices of the unconscious, furtively informing talk without becoming the subjects of talk; it is simultaneously the practical accomplishment of ordinary people giving concrete expression to

[41] See, Debra Kamin .2016. " In Israel a New Passion for Palestinian Cuisine", *New York Times*, 1 November,https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/06/travel/in-israel-a-new-passion-for-arabic-palestinian-cuisine.html?_r=0.

[42] This was the way he defined his national identity.

their understanding of the nation. Nationhood does not only define their talk: it is defined by their talk".[43] The inclusion of the notion of "Palestinian food" in the everyday discourse of Israelis and the distinction in their speech between Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian cuisines implies not only a change in their food preferences or a desire for new flavours, but a change in how left-wing Israelis perceive the place of their nation in the Middle East. For example, Jonathan, a participant who appears in previous chapters, continues to refer to Palestinian restaurants as Arabic restaurants, preferring those that market themselves as "Arab-Israeli Restaurants." A clear example of this is his selection of restaurants in Jaffa, a fundamental city in both the collective memories of Israelis as well as Palestinians.

Jaffa is well-known especially for their hummus which, according to Noa, an Israeli food consultant mentioned in previous chapters, is one of the most well-known varieties of the dish consumed in the Middle East. But hummus is not the only dish available in the city, considered by Israelis as part of Tel Aviv. Hundreds of Palestinian, Greek, Italian, Japanese restaurants can be found in Jaffa. Dr. Shakshuka, the restaurant that popularized the famous North African dish, is also a resident of this Arab city and attracts hundreds of tourists and Israelis each day to its doors. Although shakshuka has become an iconic Israeli dish, served in hundreds of Israeli restaurants around the world, Dr. Shakshuka has no problem in labelling the dish as well as the whole menu of his restaurant as Jewish North African.

Jaffa has a lively gastronomic culture and nightlife and is a common place for Israelis to meet for drinks or dinner. Ariel, one of my participants mentioned previously, enjoyed the "old vibe" of this area and the liveliness of the bars and of the Flea Market. He talked especially about two places: *Aboulafia Bakery* and *The Old Man and the Sea.* Both restaurants serve Palestinian food but Ariel only referred to them as Arab restaurants. After some conversations, he admitted that one of the reasons he always took tourists to *Aboulafia* was the good relationship the owners had with Israelis. He wanted to showcase the multiculturalism of Israel and downplay what people saw in the news about the country. According to him, during the second intifada, Israelis perceived Jaffa as a threatening place to be as it was the site of revolts and violence, so the bakery almost went into bankruptcy. After a few months, they opened another shop in Tel Aviv so that Israelis afraid to go to the bakery in Jaffa could go to the new one. Aboulafia's was established in 1879 and is open 24 hours. Its menu includes not only

[43] Jon E. Fox, Cynthia Miller-Idriss. 2008. "Everyday nationhood". *Ethnicities*. 8(4), pp.539.

traditional Arab pastries but also the Sephardic borekas[44], a favourite snack of Jewish Israelis, made of puff pastry and different fillings like white cheese and spinach, boiled eggs or aubergine which comply with kosher laws. Ariel favoured this bakery not because he believed it was the best one, but because he saw it as an 'authentic' place that should be promoted because of the loyalty of their owners to the state. The perception that Christian Arabs are "good Arabs" is common. This phenomenon can be seen in other places such as Abu Gosh: although it is mainly Muslim, Jewish Israelis believe it to be a Christian town as they have a good relationship with the population. Aboulafia responds to the idea of the good Arab, of the times when people got along, and the owners are seen as less threatening and less "Palestinian" than Muslim Arabs.

Aboulafia and Abu Gush respond to the idea of the good Arab and are seen as less threatening and less "Palestinian" than Muslim Arabs. From Ariel's perspective, the political view of a cook or baker is the key to deciding if their food is good and edible or not and should be avoided. Although he does not personally know the owners, he tends to determine if they are "good" or "bad" by attaching political positions and friendliness to religion. This tendency, to equate political positions to a particular culture, in this case a religion, was analysed by Mahmood Mamdani after 9/11. According to Mamdani it implies an inclination to ignore historical processes by which individual identities are shaped and sees cultures as static and unchanging[45]. This phenomenon was particularly clear to me when I bought meat from a butcher in an Arab village close to the West Bank. When I asked my host if he knew if the meat was halal, he told me he didn't think it was, as the butcher seemed happy to have so many Jewish clients.

Although the political preferences and the religion of a cook or owner of a food business are not the only aspects that mark the transformation of Arab/Palestinian food into good food for Israelis,[46] they seem to play a key role for part of the population. Through a process of

[44] There are thousands of varieties of burekas that can be found around the world. Their origin might be Ottoman. However, the burekas available in Israel are never made with filo pastry like in Turkey but with a flaky dough and are traditionally filled with burned aubergine, cheese and spinach, or egg.

[45] Mahmood Mamdani.2002. "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism", *American Anthropologist.* 104(3) p.767.

[46] The abundance of food and the price are also fundamental. For reasons of space and time I decided to leave these factors out of the presentation.

creolization, Middle Eastern dishes lost their nationality and were appropriated or relabelled in order to be eaten. In the case of Ariel, they might have even lost their religion.

Arab food most must be cheap and abundant

Another example of "Arab" restaurants in Yaffo is *The Old Man and the Sea*. The label "Arab" is given to any restaurant that serves food in the form of mezze; little plates filled with salads, hummus, and falafel that are put at the centre of the table and accompanied by bread and grilled meat as the main course. Mezze is known to be the equivalent of the Western first course of a meal. However, they tend to be so abundant, especially in this restaurant, that most diners never order the main course. At *The Old Man and the Sea* the price for mezze is fixed, and the waiters fill the table with hundreds of little plates that come out every few minutes. Israelis particularly appreciate the fixed price and the abundance of food as it means that going out to this restaurant does not make you a *Freier*[47]. Being a *Freier* is a common fear among Israelis, and their choice of restaurant and dishes is sometimes related to it. As "Arab" restaurants are seen as cheap, and "good value for money" they are preferred by Israelis on a lot of occasions independently of the quality of the food. In this regard, Nir Avieli says "Israelis are satisfied only when the feel that they have gotten full value and have not been taken for suckers when they feel they can face the heavy demands of contemporary life in Israel and the looming threats of the future, Israelis like it big." Arab restaurants in which, generally speaking, food is cheap and abundant, respond to the logic of value for money so embedded in the Israeli culture, therefore they have become popular among the Jewish population of the state.

Aboulafia and *The Old Man and the Sea* are only two examples of "Arab" restaurants that can be found in Jaffa. However, depending on the region in Israel, restaurants that sell Palestinian food are hidden behind other adjectives. For example, "Galilean cuisine" refers to the food eaten in the north of the country and is normally Palestinian, Syrian or Lebanese food. These restaurants became popular among Jewish Israelis not only because of the quality of the food they serve but also the quantity, price and the relationship the owners have with the State of Israel. In most cases, these restaurants are popular as they are seen as traditional, they "have always been there" and several generations of the same family may be frequent clients. "Good

[47] Yiddish word commonly translated as "sucker" and used in everyday Hebrew.

Arab" restaurants are known by a large part of the middle-class population of Israel and recommendations will be given among friends and family members.

Although unspoken, the places Israelis choose to eat can tell us about their political convictions. While Ariel only chooses Arab restaurants that have owners that seem friendly towards him and his country, others would prefer to go to Palestinian restaurants or at least call them by that name, therefore tacitly acknowledging their existence and right to have a nation.

However, it is still uncommon among the majority of the Jewish Israeli population to talk about Palestinian food. The denial of the influence of Palestinian food is sometimes hidden behind the recognition of the influence of Mizrahi food. As mentioned before, Mizrahi food transformed itself from being seen as a cheap street food alternative to a recognised "ethnic food." In the next section, I will analyse the ambiguities that labelling Mizrahi food as ethnic food presents, as well as the way Mizrahim and Ashkenazim deal with the "other-self": the Jewish-Arab.

The Ashkenazi vs. Mizrahi cook-off

As I have argued in previous chapters, it is still impossible to talk about a traditional Israeli cuisine. Although there is a strong culinary culture, based in the traditions developed in the diaspora and mixed with local ingredients, Palestinian food and new influences from Asia and the West, it is not possible to find a standard menu or even a national dish.

Israeli culinary culture has become one more field of battle between different sectors of the population that claim the nation and its identity for themselves. Mizrahim and Ashkenazim have been fighting for the prominence of their cuisines on the Israeli table since even before the establishment of the State, and although it is clear that Mizrahi food is becoming more popular every day, Ashkenazim are not yet willing to give up.

In recent decades, Mizrahi food has won a special place in the Israeli table, while Ashkenazi food is labelled by many, as "grey tasteless food." Although in the first decades of Israel's history, European food was seen as the standard, "elegant" choice, Mizrahi food, especially Iraqi, is now one of the most popular cuisines in the country. One good example of a Mizrahi restaurant is *Azura,* which can be found in the Mahane Yehuda market in Jerusalem. *Azura* opened in the 1950s and serves Mizrahi food, especially Turkish, Iraqi and Syrian, countries were the Jewish communities flourished for centuries. Their kibbe soups, (beetroot

or lemon soups with semolina dumplings filled with meat) traditional in Iraq are their most popular dishes together with their hummus, potatoes and slow-cooked meat dishes. The restaurant is popular with locals and tourists alike to the point that they decided to open a franchise in Tel Aviv. "People used to travel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem just to eat in Azura. Jerusalem is the sacred city of kibbe, but now you can get good Mizrahi food in Tel Aviv", Noa told me. The new branch of *Azura* not only responds to the quality of their food and their good prices but to the rise of demand for "ethnic" food among young Tel Avivians that preferred to stay in their city and avoid the conflicting old-fashioned Jerusalem.

However, although Mizrahi food now has a legitimate place on the Israeli table, it is still labelled as "ethnic" food even when Middle Eastern Jews represent more than 52% of the Jewish population of Israel.[48] Although some of my participants did not agree with the idea of Mizrahi food being "tastier" than Ashkenazi, they did perceive an increase in its popularity in recent years.

I asked most of my participants why they thought Mizrahi food had won the battle for the Israeli table, and only one of them did not agree and felt the question was offensive. Ayala one of my Hungarian participants mentioned previously, assured me that Mizrahi food was neither tastier nor more popular than Ashkenazi food and that the main problem was that Ashkenazi food was not valued enough. In her own words: "I find that question slightly offensive. Mizrahi food did not win the battle. The problem is people tend to believe Ashkenazi food is grey, boiled chicken soup, or gefiltefish, or poorly done kreplach. But Ashkenazi food has thousands of different dishes and varieties. Jewish Hungarian food is Ashkenazi food and is tasty and spicy, nothing to do with Polish food". To some extent, her children agree. Although they never mentioned to me that Ashkenazi food was superior to Mizrahi food they did express strong views about Yemenite food: "they put butter in everything and just for that they believe their food is good. Butter and dough: there is nothing more to Yemenite food".

Although Ayala's family seemed to have a preference for Ashkenazi food I was able to observe that their belittlement of Mizrahi food did not extend to Palestinian food. As a left-wing Zionist family, they rejected the settlement policies of the right, consumed Palestinian food, and some of the members of the family spoke Arabic and had worked with Palestinian

[48] Canadian Jewish Advocacy. "Demographics of Israel" accessed on 16 February 2017 http://www.cija.ca/resource/israel-the-basics/demographics-of-israel/

families in the past. They preferred to buy freshly-made hummus from Israeli Arabs in Jaffa and enjoyed traveling around the country in search of good "Arabic food." On more than one occasion they manifested their preference for Arabic food over Mizrahi and made a clear distinction between the food and the people that cooked it.

Ayala's family opinions show the relationship between food preferences and political convictions. As secular left-wing Tel Avivians they saw in their preference for Palestinian food instead of Mizrahi a rational and politically correct attitude, that was in agreement with their Zionist left-wing views. On the other hand, they labelled Mizrahi food as "simple" and "cheap", a reflection of their own thoughts about these sectors of the Jewish Israeli population whom they thought to be simple, ignorant and sometimes backwards.

Ayala was not the only one who became offended when I asked why Mizrahi food was more popular than Ashkenazi food in Israel. When I asked this question, it was commonly received with a smile and a laugh as if the question and its answer were simply too evident. Most of my Ashkenazi informants were certain that the reason behind people favouring Mizrahi food had nothing to do with the price or the availability of its ingredients, but simply with the fact that it is tastier. However, Josef, a young food writer who has been mentioned previously did not take the question well. As an Ashkenazi, he felt proud of his grandmother's food and did not think it was culinarily inferior to Mizrahi food: "No no, our food is as good as their food, but they never want to taste our dishes. We do taste and appreciate their food, but they don't. It is political resentment, you know? Because we treated them badly before, they now get their revenge by saying our food is bad". Josef again is highlighting the political dimension of food preferences. He acknowledges the political grievances of the Mizrahi population and affirms that it is manifested in the indifference and even contempt towards Ashkenazi food. He, similar to Ayala and her family, does consume Palestinian food and carefully distinguishes it from Mizrahi food, openly saying he prefers the former. He also lives in Jaffa, values local products, and favours Palestinian cause.

Josef is right to say that Mizrahim as well as their food were belittled in Israel. Mizrahi food was not always as popular as it is now. It was not until the nineties that most of my Mizrahi informants went back to their culinary roots and started to cook the food of their grandparents, or at least tried to recover their forgotten traditions. Hava, for example, remembered that her husband did not cook anything Iraqi until recently when they got an Iraqi cookbook and started an annual family reunion where only Iraqi food was allowed. Previously, as Esther Meir-

Glitzenstein argues, the consumption of Ashkenazi food, such as herring, was perceived by Iraqi Jews as a sign of assimilation to the new land, and although when they arrived in Israel, they manifested their repulsion to it, in later decades they would relate it to Israeli authentic identity and successful immigration.[49]

Hava constantly highlighted in her life accounts how in previous decades her family was unable to cook their traditional food as they were taught that a real Israeli ate European food. But nowadays Mizrahim not only highlight their traditions in family reunions but also open businesses that were not only directed to customers with the same origin but the general public. In Kfar Saba, for example, two Mizrahi business became popular among the population in recent years: a Moroccan pastry shop that sells traditional sweets, bread, and pastries, and a private catering company owned by an Iraqi woman that sold Shabbat dinners every Friday morning. During my stay Ruth, an informant also mentioned in previous chapters, bought food from both places on several occasions, while she never bought Ashkenazi food. The closeness and convenience of both places were a factor, but also a certain admiration for the intensive labour involved in the preparation of Mizrahi food and the unwillingness of Ruth or her mother to try to reproduce it at home. Although there was admiration in the labour that was put into Mizrahi food (like kibbeh or Moroccan sweets) there was also a degree of belief that modern women like them, did not have time to make these kinds of dishes, even when making Ashkenazi dishes like dumplings can be just as time-consuming. This again speaks to the perception, although not recognised any more by most of the Ashkenazi population, that Mizrahim as well as Arabs are backwards and more traditional.

However, an important difference to Arab restaurants is that both of them were Jewish. The idea that Arabic food can be dirty was not exclusive to Ruth, and it was shared not only by some Ashkenazi participants but by Mizrahi participants as well. As I argued before in this chapter, Israelis can use the term Arab as an insult, and in this case as equivalent to dirtiness.

On several occasions, while eating Mizrahi food, participants talked about how they avoided supermarkets where Arab Israelis did their vegetable shopping as they "smell bad." They would also point out the simplicity of "Arab food" and its lack of sophistication like

[49] Esther Meir-Glitzenstein, 2015. "Longing for the Aromas of Baghdad: Food, Emigration and Transformation in the lives of Iraqi Jews in Israel in the 1950s" in Anat Helman. ed. *Jews and their Foodways*. Kindle ed. New York: Oxford University Press, Loc. 4335.

"falafel" while pointing out that even if the origin of their food was the same, Mizrahi food was Jewish and therefore essentially different.

Arab or Jewish

Although the majority of my Mizrahi participants talked lengthily and nostalgically about their countries of origin, and some of them even travel frequently to them,[50] they did not see themselves, their food or their traditions as Arab and perceived their relationship to the Middle East through their own relationship to Israel. They did not see themselves as Arabs and talked about those countries of origins as if they had been guests, or temporary residents. Ronal Ranta suggests that the ambiguity of the Arab-Jewish identity began even before the state was built "The most important other-self within Zionism is the Mizrahi Jew, who upon immigrating to the Western-oriented Ashkenazi-European dominated Israeli, was forced to make a choice: either to be an Arab or a Jew. Being both was not acceptable anymore".[51]

During my fieldwork, I attend a dinner with a Mizrahi family who, while serving me Moroccan tea in a traditional tea set, talked about the problem of the backwardness of the Arab countries, making a clear distinction between Mizrahi Jews and Muslim Arabs. This ambiguity in their relationship with their countries of origin, of nostalgia and disengagement, is not different to the Ashkenazi identity of being simultaneously European and Jewish. However, while Ashkenazis do not talk about Europeans as backwards, or perceive them as enemies, Mizrahis do about their countries of origin, making their relationship with the diaspora even more complicated.

However, this, of course, cannot be generalized. In an interview with a well-known culinary figure of Israel, he pointed out that he felt much more identified with Palestinians than with the European diaspora, and he identified himself as an Arab Jew and a Middle Eastern. Some of my participants missed the days of peace with the Arab countries, and remembered with nostalgia how they shared festivals and holidays with their Muslim neighbours before the State of Israel was established.

[50]Most of the Mizrahi Jews in Israel that participated in my research did not feel safe or were not allowed to go back to their countries, however Moroccan Jews did travel frequently and insisted to other Israelis that traveling to Morocco was safe for them.

[51] Yonatan Mendel and Ronald Ranta, 2016. *From the Arab Other to the Israeli Self*, Ashgate: Farnham p.10

Mizrahi culture is still belittled in Israel. While it was well seen that I manifested a preference for Mizrahi food I was asked for explanations if I openly said I had a taste for Mizrahi music. And while is clear that a considerably large section of the Israeli population prefers Mizrahi food, it is not a reflection of an improvement of the life and status of the people that cook it. It has happened the same way with Jewish Ethiopian food, also labelled as ethnic food and popular especially in Tel Aviv; however, Ethiopians are still discriminated against and looked down upon.

The case of Mizrahi food in Israel is especially interesting as it reflects the contradictions and ambiguities in the relationship with Middle Eastern culture. It seems that being Israeli erases the possibility of being simultaneously Jewish and Arab suggesting that the Mizrahi population highlights the Jewish character of their identity while downplaying the Arabic elements.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I tried to shed some light on how Jewish Israelis consumed, named and talked about Palestinian food and the political connotations of these behaviours. I have also discussed the role of Mizrahi food in the Israeli discourse of Arab food and how the Arab-Jewish identity has been forgotten and denied by some segments of the Israeli population.

Nationalist apparatus dictates to their citizens what is proper and improper conduct for the national identity they hold. The first pioneers in Israel had the aim of creating a New Jew who was different from the diasporic Jew, yet Zionist roots were deeply embedded in European nationalist ideologies. To create this new identity, Yonatan Mendel and Ronal Ranta argue that pioneers had to mimic some customs of the indigenous population of Palestine and then created a new identity "that had local Oriental characteristics, but that was not integrated or identical to the local Arab-Palestinians." Therefore, the Israeli identity appropriated the Palestinian culture but hid its Arab origins and labelled it as local or as Biblical. In other cases, such as Yonatan, the influence of Arab food, for example, is accepted as long as it is perceived as friendly and not Muslim. On the other hand, Israeli identity does not imagine the possibility of being simultaneously Arab and Jewish. Hence, the Mizrahi population emphasises Jewish characteristics of their identity while undervaluing the Arab elements in it.

The food was then used not only to separate groups and determine who belonged to the Israeli collective, but also to establish how the nation has to be performed. However, nations

are not monolithic constructions, and in the case of Israel, different groups and subcultures understand the notion of Israeliness in different ways. The Ashkenazi establishment tried to erase the difference between the groups that were part of the new State but failed to impose a unified national culture. This failure is reflected, as mentioned in the previous chapter, in the variety and diversity of Israeli food. Although nowadays Mizrahi culture is still belittled by the Ashkenazi establishment, the rise of the popularity of Mizrahi food seems to be not only a consequence of Israel's cosmopolitanism but, as Nir Avieli pointed to me, a symbol of the slow but clear Orientalization of Israel.

On the other hand, although there is a segment of the population that is unwilling to see the Palestinian population as the mortal enemy, in recent years it also seems that Israel is moving to the political right. However, the segments of the population that label themselves as left-wing have decided to eat, name and talk not only of Arab food but of Palestinian food. This can be interpreted as a form of everyday resistance, of again, as redemptive movements used by the left-wing population to show their dissatisfaction with the status quo without breaking their social connections.

Final considerations on the study of food culture and nationhood.

When you are writing a PhD dissertation on Israeli food culture you have to develop a thick skin. Some people believe that researching food culture is more of a female pastime than serious research worthy of a PhD. Others immediately assume that the study of Israel implies a blind support for the policies of this state. Most people also ask about my religion, as if it was the only possible explanation for my interest in this topic. Probably my worst experiences while writing this dissertation were at Israeli Studies conferences, in which my research was simply ignored by senior male academics that only had the courtesy to ask me where I shop in London or pointed out that it was a better idea for me to talk to their wives than to them, serious scholars that study the politics of Israel and the conflicts in the region.

Thankfully, I was lucky enough to find colleagues —both in Middle Eastern Studies and in Anthropology— that thought that my research was not only worthy of scholarly inquiry but relevant and interesting. With them I shared the understanding that food and identity are intimately connected experiences and that cooking and eating can be deeply political. I had long conversations and discussions with them, and most of them asked which dishes I considered part of the Israeli food repertoire. A lot of them imagined that hummus and falafel were on top of the national Israeli food list, and therefore that my thesis centred around the discussion of the cooking and consumption of them. They were definitely surprised when I said that during my fieldwork I had eaten as much falafel as I did chicken soup and other Eastern European dishes. These comments and questions made me think about the way Israel is represented by others and by itself to foreigners, and how the European elements of its culture can be downplayed; an element that is not only important but key to understanding the establishment of the Jewish state, its history and culture. Still, this general assumption also made me consider the undeniable role of the Middle Eastern element in the history of the country, and its conflicting place in Israeli society.

Although now it seems impossible to me to understand Israel without taking into account the different groups that shape the country, at the time; what seemed to be missing in my conversations about my research was the acknowledgement that Israel is not a monolithic culture. On the contrary, Israel is made up of hundreds of communities that emigrated during the twentieth century and therefore, when we talk about Israel, we need to talk about an enormous amount of different understandings and conceptualizations of what Israel is and what it means to be Israeli. The country's diversity and divisions that are

not always amicable are well-known by Israelis, and they were eager to show me how their food mirrored them. For this reason, almost every Israeli that I approach was immediately interested and willing to participate in my research. Some of them not only wanted to participate in it, but to help me design it. They came up with thousands of questions they believed I should address in my research: why are there so many vegans in Israel? Where does *sabih* come from? Which is the history of *Bamba*?[1] Is *crembo*[2] actually Israeli or does anybody else eat it? Is there such a thing as Israeli food? Why is Mizrahi food so popular? I learned, through experience, that questions about food were at the centre of the Israeli identity and some of them even went as far as to say that finding a definition of Israeli food was the national question.

I noticed the central place of food for the Israeli identity by talking with Israelis but also through different experiences. In one occasion, after a dinner with some friends, one of them Israeli, I got a call from his wife asking me to avoid talking in front of her husband about Israeli food as our discussion around the origin of *crembo* had provoked in him a deep identity crisis. I also witnessed several passionate discussions, most of them on social media, about the origins of certain dishes that are sometimes labelled Israeli. One participant, Ariel, after learning that I was pregnant, kindly remind me to feed my child with *Bamba* as soon as possible, to avoid any possibility of him developing peanut allergies.

All of these discussions, and the interaction with my participants and other people interested in talking about food, helped me formulate the main questions in this thesis. They also proved to me that food culture is central for comprehending how ordinary people understand their belonging to a nation and which everyday tools they use to construct their national identities. My main question: How do ordinary Israelis use food in their everyday life to construct, perform, choose, talk about and negotiate their idea of nationhood was not only the result of individual research but of spending time with Israelis that helped me realize what the topics that concerned them in relation to their own food culture were.

[1] Industrially produced snack with a high content of peanuts. It has a soft texture similar to *Cheetos* and is given to children even before they are one year old. All of my participants affirm that is scientifically proven that this is the reason why Israeli children are not allergic to peanuts and they consider it the national snack, some of them even said it was the national dish.

[2] Also known as the winter ice cream, it consists of a frozen biscuit with marshmallow on top and covered in chocolate. Although traditionally a common processed dessert, it is now possible to find artisanal versions. It is also considered something "really Israeli" although many countries consume similar products.

Since my first visit to Israel, I sensed that the relationship between ordinary Israelis and food was one of the key aspects to understand better who they are and who they aspire to be. And I was not mistaken, t food culture is at the centre of the nation, and it is in everyday life, through routines and mundane actions that ordinary people not only learn what it means to be national but also how to negotiate and sometimes resist the ideas imposed by others—especially elites—on how they should behave to be considered part of the nation.

In this dissertation, I have tried to demonstrate by using ethnographic data, the ways in which food is used for the construction of national identity, not only by non-elites but by elites. Each of the chapters of the thesis helped me to present the reader with an image of Israeli society that not only allowed me to explore my questions but also to illustrate the complexities of a society that is anything but a monolithic, uniform one.

As mentioned in the introduction, one of the main goals of this research was to shed light on the role of the everyday in the construction of nationalism, the relationship between food and nationhood as well as highlighting the forgotten role of women in this construction of the idea of what it means to be national. Each of my chapters focused on one of these topics and by analysing how people talk, consume, choose and perform the nation in the everyday, I suggested that it is impossible to understand nationhood without looking at the private sphere. I hope that by now, it is clear for the reader that food can not only be a useful tool for the elites to impose ideas of the nation, but is also a key feature of national identity. It is through daily routines that ordinary people learn how to be national, and it is women, as main socializers of new comers who play a fundamental role in determining what is to be understood as national.

Another of my goals was to explore an understudied yet fundamental aspect of Israeli society: the conflicts within. The realm of scholarly studies concerning Israel centres around the study of the country in relation to its neighbours and its position in the region. Even when researching internal politics, it seems that conflict with Palestine takes a prominent space. Just a quick look at Israeli Studies journals and conferences panels will confirm that anthropological and sociological queries are either ignored or given second place, while research that is ingrained in international relations and political science takes prominence. From my point of view, this is a mistake. The understanding of the conflicts within Israeli society, of its main values and of the way ordinary people live nationhood from an anthropological perspective, can provide researchers as well as decision-makers with a better

view of society and a deeper understanding of intersocietal tensions, which may, in turn, shed a different light onto the conflict with Palestine. I argued many times in this dissertation that ordinary people are not simple receptors of ideas and concepts of the nation. On the contrary, non-elites reproduce the nation in the everyday, resist impositions of elites and socialize newcomers into the national community. Therefore, if we want to understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a first step is to look at the problems within each of these societies and the way each one understands the nation. In order to find the roots of the conflict, we need to look at the way national identities are constructed in everyday life not only in high politics.

Many of my informants were keen to participate in my research with the goal of showing me and my future readers that they not only have excellent food but that they are "normal, simple, people." I hope I did their desires justice. I have tried to portray a society in which thousands of points of views coexist, not always peacefully but in the same way as in many other countries. Mizrahim and Ashkenazim as well as Jews and non-Jews understand Israeliness in different ways and therefore make it impossible to picture the country as a unified nation. It has been my intention not to describe Israel as an exceptional country but as an ordinary one, made by ordinary citizens that are simultaneously proud and ashamed of their country. Eliana, the Zionist immigrant that left her family and country behind to live in a town in the middle of the desert and help to build her dream country; is proud of her city and her work at the municipality, but deeply ashamed of the way the country treats Arab citizens.

Like anybody else that is confronted with somebody that is writing about their country, most of my participants tried to discuss only the positive sides of their society with me. But I lived with them; I witnessed their family disagreements, cooked with them and walked their dogs. Like many others, the Friedman family opened the doors of their house to me with the aim of showing me how welcoming Israelis could be. And they were, however, I also witnessed the family disputes, their prejudices, and internal divisions. By sharing with them their routines and celebrations they eventually revealed those aspects of themselves and their country that they were not so proud of, or preferred to keep quiet. I hope that by talking about these conflicts, I bring to their attention and the readers to those aspects of nationalism less known, and how ordinary people everywhere, understand the nation.

Appendix

Informants

All of the names of my informants have been pseudonymised and, upon their request, some of the details of their families were changed to avoid them being recognised. In cases in which more than one member of the family participated in the research, I included a surname to identify them.

Hava

Hava Zaban is a left-wing secular woman in her sixties. I met her daughter at an Israeli Studies conference, and after hearing about my research she told me she wanted to participate and introduce me to her family. Hava was born in Israel, in a kibbutz. Her family emigrated to Israel from Hungary, at the end of the Second World War. She lost several members of her family in the Holocaust including her grandparents and she talks about this openly. Her husband's family is from Iraq, and she seems to be really close to them. I saw Hava regularly during my stay in Israel in 2015 but I was never able to visit her at her home. Hava lives in a Moshav in central Israel, but access to the Moshav is difficult without a car, so we met in coffeeshops in Ranana and Tel Aviv. We talked in a mix of English and Hebrew. When talking about her memories of the kibbutz she always preferred to talk in Hebrew. Hava mainly talked about her past, her life in the kibbutz and the story of her grandparents. She was convinced her family had been cursed as a result of her grandparents being cousins.

Hava is mentioned in Chapter 2, Chapter 3, Chapter 6 and Chapter 7.

Esther Freedman

Esther Freedman is an independent, secular Ashkenazi woman in her eighties. She lived alone in the house she shared with her husband in Ranana until his death more than a decade ago. I lived with one of her daughters and her family for three months in 2015 in the same town as Esther. I saw Esther at least twice a week and I got especially close to her. She seemed to be keen on talking about her life and about cooking. Originally from the United States (she never said from where) she emigrated to Israel during the fifties, not because of her Zionist ideals but because she had fallen in love with an Israeli man. During her first years in Israel she struggled with her new life in Israel. She was not used to scarcity and found it difficult to

deal with it. She worked as a teacher most of her life and she had an MA in Anthropology. Esther preferred to talk in English, and when she was around, most of the conversations among the family where in English. She loves cooking, especially Asian flavours but cooks traditional Ashkenazi food for her family. She learned to cook in Israel, as she said her mother was incapable of cooking anything. According to Esther, most of her recipes came from Lilian Cornfeld's books as well as *The Jerusalem Post.* Keeping tradition and transmitting Jewish identity is fundamental for Esther and this is obvious in her cooking. Although irreverent and not too keen on following religious rules, she does keep a kosher house, cooks traditional dishes for Friday dinners and holidays and only breaks the rules when she is outside.

Esther is mentioned in Chapter 2, Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6.

Ruth Freedman

Ruth is Esther's oldest daughter. She lives with her husband in Ranana, a few minutes away from her mother's house. She was born in Israel and has always lived in Ranana, she is now in her fifties, has three grown up children and eight grandchildren. Ruth is an agricultural engineer, but she only told me that a few weeks before I left as she had never worked as one. She now runs a small family business with her son but spends most of her time taking care of her grandchildren. Ruth and her family wanted to help me in my research, but above all they wanted to show me that "Israelis are good people". Ruth's family was introduced to me by an Israeli anthropologist who had done her PhD with one of Ruth's relatives. I lived in Ruth's house for almost three months and I got to know almost all of the members of her family. During those months, I spent all my weekends with them and shared most of my meals. I also spent holidays with them, celebrated birthdays and anniversaries, visited other family members, cooked and ate with them. The family referred to me as "their cousin" although I noticed the neighbours knew me as "the anthropologist".

Ruth doesn't have a passion for cooking, however she spends a considerable amount of her time in the kitchen as well as planning menus and generally thinking about how to feed her family, especially her grandchildren. Esther picks her grandkids up from school and takes them to her house where she feeds them and helps them with homework. They also spend their weekends with them and she sometimes takes them on holidays with her and her husband.

Ruth might not enjoy cooking, but she does like good food and wine. She doesn't drink often, but when she does she prefers red wine and beer over other drinks. She is not religious, and she avoids kosher wine, but she doesn't like the smell of pork and I never saw her cooking or eating a non-kosher dish.

Ruth and I had a good but distant relationship. When we were alone we talked in English and when the children where there we talked in Hebrew. She was proud to see my Hebrew improving and was always asking if I had understood what was going on or if I needed translation. She considers both English and Hebrew her mother tongues, and in the same way than her mother Esther, they both prefer to read in English. Although I spent most of my time with her while I was living in her house, I noticed she was careful with what she did and how she acted when I was around. She tried to council certain facts about her life and her family life from me and if she felt the conversation was turning personal she immediately started talking about politics or food; the topics she believed I was interested in.

Ruth is mentioned in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

Yael Freedman

Yael is Ruth's husband. He works in a Hi-Tech company outside of Tel Aviv and travels constantly. I saw him most weekends but during the week he was working most of the time. He was always concerned about my well-being, but we never exchanged more than a few words. During Shabbat, he always had questions about my Jewishness and I caught him on more than one occasion observing if I was able to say the Shabbat praying without reading.

Nathan Freedman

Nathan is Ruth's son-in-law. In his late thirties, in 2015 he had two small children and was trying to get a job in a University outside of Israel to continue his studies in psychology. He is an avid cook, always happy to experiment and learn new flavours. He asked me for Mexican recipes a few times and asked me how to use certain ingredients. He was always involved in some way in the preparation of food on Saturday and was willing to help Ruth in any possible task. However, they were always discussing and fighting about politics. While Ruth considers herself centre-right, Nathan votes for the left. Although the political discussions were

constant, there was never a violent disagreement; but this might had been affected by my presence in the house.

During family gatherings, Nathan constantly pointed out things he thought could be useful for my work.

Noa Freedman

Noa is Ruth's younger sister. She lives in the same street as her mother Esther with her husband and her two teenage sons. She studied chemistry at university, but she now works as an art teacher and runs workshops at her house. Noa is lively and outspoken, always joking and talking about those things her sister wanted to council for me. I met Noa through her sister who thought it could be important for me to visit a Modern Orthodox house. We met at her house twice during 2015 and then I saw her at a few family gatherings at Ruth's home. We also had a few conversations in her car. She visited Tel Aviv a few times a week and she offered to take me to my Hebrew class on several occasions. She liked having me around and sharing her recipes with me, as she seems to be proud of her cooking and to really enjoy it. "Every time I see you I feel like I'm in Master Chef, I love it!" told me once giggling while we cooked a fish dish.

Noa is married to a Mizrahi orthodox man, a fact that is controversial and not well regarded by her family, especially by Ruth. Noa grew up in a secular household and nowadays she runs an orthodox house. She has to avoid some family reunions as she and her family only eat kosher food. She was also the only one of my participants that kept Sabbath and avoided any type of work on Saturdays.

I had a good relationship with Noa. She always talked to me openly about her life as an orthodox woman and the difficult relationship she had with her mother-in-law. She talked to me about her family life but also about her beliefs and her political positions. Noa sympathizes with right wing candidates however she had concerns about voting for the right in the election of 2015 as she thought the right solution for the conflict was still the two-state solution and the electoral platforms seem to prefer a one state solution.

As mentioned before she did enjoyed cooking, but she was also constantly under pressure from her husband pressure to cook the same way that his mother did. Running a kosher house

is a complicated and time-consuming job and Noa spend most of her time trying to follow all the rules that are important for her husband and her children. Nonetheless, she did share with me her scepticism about the importance of following this law and how she believed they it not be so important for God. Ruth also shared with me that when they go on holidays without her husband she will happily mix dairy and meat and relax a little bit.

Noa explained all of her recipes to me in detail, she also told me which ingredients she preferred, and even when we were not cooking she talked about food with me. Food gave her comfort but cooking was a source of constant conflict and tension with her husband.

Noa is mentioned in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

Chen

Chen is a very well-known cook in Israel. Ofer Vadi, a publisher that I meet through the Gefiltefest[3] in London introduced me to her while I was in Israel. I believe Chen is now in her fifties, although she never mentioned her age when we met. Chen has been the host of several cooking and traveling shows and has also written a few cookbooks. I was supposed to interview her only for an hour, but we ended up spending the day together. She was disappointed at first when she saw I did not have a camera with me, and that I wasn't Italian[4] but after our initial encounter she became more relaxed and took me from restaurant to restaurant in Tel Aviv, introducing me to restaurateurs and chefs. The interview was carried out in a mix of languages, as Chen was keen to speak in English, Spanish and Italian even though I don't speak the latter. However, the conversation quickly changed to Hebrew every time she introduced me to somebody new. Chen seemed to be known by everybody in the food industry in Israel and walked around markets and restaurants with authority, expecting people to respect her and to give her a special treatment. Chen did not ask me to anonymise her, however, after a few drinks I noticed she had probably told me more than she wished to, so I decided to anonymise her anyway. At the beginning of our conversation she managed the interview as though she was being interviewed by a journalist, giving me well studied answers and focusing in talking about hummus and falafel. As time went by, she started to tell me her

[3] Annual Jewish Food Festival in London that takes place every year in the summer in the Jewish Community Centre (JW3).

[4] My surname made her think I was Italian and she was excited about being able to practice her Italian.

story focusing on her relationship to food. Chen was born in Israel, and grew up in a kibbutz. She did not mention her father or his family and she concentrated on telling me her mother's story and her childhood in the kibbutz. Her mother abandoned her when she was young, leaving her in Israel while she ran away with an Italian priest she had fallen in love with. Chen didn't seem resentful, on the contrary it appeared that she was proud of her mother. Chen's greatest cooking influence was her Moroccan grandmother who "taught her how to enjoy food" when she went to visit her from the kibbutz. Chen constantly pointed out to me the importance of mentioning Palestinian food and Jewish Middle Eastern food in my dissertation. Our interview took place a week after the elections of 2015, and she was disappointed about the results. She asked everybody that we met during the day if they had voted for Benjamin Netanyahu and was sincerely concerned about not finding anybody. "Who voted for him then??" she asked constantly while she made clear her vote had gone to the left-wing party Maaretz although she was tempted to vote for the Arab-list.

Chen invited me to cook a Mexican dinner in her house a few weeks later, but then she decided to travel to Italy and it was impossible to meet with her again.

Chen is mentioned in Chapter 3.

Josef

Josef is a food journalist in his thirties. He discovered his passion for journalism when he was doing his military service. He worked at the radio station of his army base and then worked professionally on different newspapers. A few years ago, he decided to start working with food, and he now hosts a TV Show in which he discusses different topics related to food, restaurants and recipes. I interviewed him twice in 2015 in a coffee shop in Jaffa next to his house. It was again Ofer Vadi who put me in contact with him. At that time, he was working on several projects including the design of a new food market in North Tel Aviv. After the interview, we kept in touch via email and he was always happy to answer questions related to food. He was keen on talking about tradition Ashkenazi cooking and had a "phobia" about kosher food.

Josef is mentioned in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 and, Chapter 7.

Rahel

Rahel is a historian and her research looks at the food culture of Israel in the first two decades of the State. She is in her fifties and lives in a house with her family in a suburb close to Tel Aviv. I contact her after an Israeli sociologist suggested I talked to her. I interviewed her in her garden for a couple of hours in 2015. Our interview was mainly about cookbooks as she was not willing to talk about anything personal. However, during the interview she found herself talking about her cooking and her family eating habits. She talked a lot about her Ashkenazi roots, her interest in Asian cooking and some of her family traditions.

Rahel is mentioned in Chapter 3.

Ofer Vadi

Ofer Vadi is the editor of *Lunchbox*, a small Israeli cookbook publishing house. I met him in the summer of 2014 at the Embassy of Israel in London and then I interviewed him in 2015 and 2016. His name is not anonymised as we never discussed anything related to his personal life. He guided me through the food world of Israel and introduce me to several of my participants. He is well connected and well-known among food writers, chefs and food consultants. He has a passion for cookbooks and helped me find the most representative Israeli cookbooks. During my fieldwork, we were in constant contact via email and he pointed out not only places that I should visit and people I should talk to, but also topics he thought were important for my dissertation.

Ofer Vadi is mentioned in Chapter 3.

Ruth Sirkis

Ruth Sirkis is one of the more beloved food writers in Israel. Now in her late seventies (she never mentioned her age) she is extremely proud of her work as a food writer and does acknowledge her role in the transformation of Israeli food ways. Chen put me in contact with her and we met a few days before Passover 2015 in a coffee shop in North Tel Aviv. The interview took around 3 hours, and we mainly discussed her cookbooks. She did not want to talk about her life, she just said she would send me that in writing (she never did). However, talking about her books meant talking about her life, so we spoke a lot about her time living in the United States and what she felt was guiding Israeli food nowadays. The interview was

conducted in a mix of Hebrew and English. The fact that I interviewed her opened the houses of many Israelis to me and it was always a good topic of conversation. My informants were curious about her and wanted to know how she was in real life, and what she had said to me.

Ruth Sirkis is mentioned in Chapter 3.

Ayala Grossman

I met Ayala at the wedding of one of her daughters in 2016. I was invited by a friend of the family, who thought it would be a good idea for me to go to a wedding in Israel. Once most of the wedding guests had left, we start talking about my research and she immediately invited me for dinner at her apartment in Tel Aviv. She was really curious about my fieldwork and asked me any time she could about my interviews with "food celebrities" and cookbook writers. I then met her on several family gatherings during the summer of 2016 including picnics, Friday dinners and a short trip to a small town close to Haifa and spent a considerable amount of time with other members of her family. I also was able to cook with her on one occasion. Ayala's family was originally from Hungary and arrived in Israel after the end of the Second World War. Some of her family members had died in concentration camps but she never told me exactly who. She is a dentist, a middle-class "left-wing Zionist" like the rest of her family. Ayala was excited to show me her cooking as she believed I had been shown the "dark side" of Ashkenazi cooking and she wanted to show me good Ashkenazi food, Hungarian dishes. I always talked with her in English as her family had spent some time living in Canada and she said she wanted to practice. But I noticed the family changed language when one of her sons-in-law from America was not present, leaving me with the suspicion that they spoke in English to make him (and probably me also) more comfortable. Ayala is proud of her Hungarian past, she has dual nationality as do her children. Interestingly, her family was originally from Transylvania, now living in Romania, and some of the dishes she cooked for me like a cabbage, cream and meat cake are more common in Romania than in Hungary. She doesn't keep kosher, although her husband and one of her daughters do and she found this strange and contradictory to their lifestyle and beliefs. At the time we met she was following a low carb diet and was constantly talking about the importance of being fit and having a healthy diet.

Ayala Grossman is mentioned in Chapter 3, Chapter 4, Chapter 6, and Chapter 7.

Yossi Grossman

Yossi Grossman is Ayala's son-in-law. He got married to one of her daughters during the summer of 2016. Yossi is in his thirties and at the time that I met him had only being living in Israel for four months. I saw Yossi at all the family gatherings I was invited to by the Grossmans and I was interested in his experience as a newcomer to Israeli society. Yossi is an American researcher and met his wife while living in Israel a few years ago. His mother is Jewish, but he grew up as a Catholic, and later in life he decided to identify himself as Jewish. Having that in common with me, he constantly told me about his experience as a newcomer, but he also highlighted his Jewish identity constantly. He mixed Yiddish words in his English and talked to me most of the time about Israel, Jewish holidays, and politics. His family-in-law found it strange that he defined himself as secular but fasted on Yom Kippur and visited synagogue from time to time.

Like other participants in the research with a similar background, as newcomers who are part of mixed faith families, Yossi didn't have a kosher diet in Israel but had adopted some eating habits that he thought where more "national" like eating fresh salads. This change was interpreted by his mother-in-law as an unmistakable sign of his adoption of Israeli ways. However, this might have been sue to his concern with his weight and his attempts to become healthier and fitter. He did quietly miss American fast food, especially fried chicken.

Yossi is mentioned in Chapter 4, and Chapter 5.

Einat

Einat is a close friend of Hava's daughter. They met when they were living in the UK five years ago, and she invited me to her apartment in Tel Aviv in 2015 a few months after she had returned to Israel. She was keen to participate in the research, however she was not sure if she could contribute to it as she didn't believe her Jewish identity was very strong. Neither she or her family are religious, and she considers herself anti-religious. She in her thirties and has two young daughters, she is vegetarian although she cooks meat for her family and they do not keep kosher. She lived with her family for a few years in the UK while her husband was finishing his PhD in dentistry. She is primary school teacher, although she had not worked since she moved to the UK. At the time that we met she was looking for a new job in Israel and was happy to go back to work.

I interviewed Einat days before Passover, and it was not a simple interview. She didn't want to speak of her family past and although she hinted to me that they were Ashkenazi and her husband's family was from Morocco and had been victims of the Holocaust she never openly said it. She has no connections with the diaspora, and when I asked where her family was from, she abruptly responded "I'm Israeli, my parents are Israeli, what do you mean, where are we from?" Einat and her family had broken any connection they had with their family past outside of Israel and this was also reflected in the way Einat shopped, cooked and ate. She was concerned with health and she tried to only cook and eat organic simple food. She said she didn't like to cook, but she did it as she considered this important for the health of her daughters. She told me nobody in her family, except her parents-in-law cooked so she didn't have any family recipes and even if she did she wouldn't have cooked "those unhealthy dishes from the past".

Our interview was in English, a language she was fluent in, although several times she had to switch to Hebrew to explain certain things or to refer to food brands. As mentioned in Chapter 4, that day she was starting to prepare for Passover, so she cut the interview after three hours. She then invited me to a Friday night dinner, but she did say she didn't think that it would be an "authentic Israeli experience" as she didn't do anything special and they normally bought food from a local restaurant.

Einat is mentioned in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

Moshe

Moshe is Ariel's sister's boyfriend. He is in his late twenties and identifies as Mizrahi. A saw him several times during my visits in 2015 and 2016 although I met him in December of 2012. When I met him, he was changing career paths and had decided to go back to school to study a technical career. By 2016 he was finishing his studies and was starting to look for a job. On the few occassions that we had conversations he only talked to me about food, specially about his mother's Iraqi cooking. He disliked Ashkenazi food and referred to it as "grey food".

Moshe is mentioned in Chapter 4.

Natasha

Natasha is a Russian woman in her twenties, one of my classmates during the time I spent in the Ulpan in Tel Aviv in 2015. Atthe time, she had been living in Israel for a year with her Israeli boyfriend. She met him at a party two years previously, while she was on holiday in Israel. She found Israeli society too "simple" and missed Russia every day. At the time, she was working as a yoga instructor but wanted to open a catering business. I saw her every day for two months, and we mainly talked in Hebrew.

Natasha is mentioned in Chapter 4.

Gil

Gil is an Ashkenazi woman in her forties who lives in central Tel Aviv. I met her casually at a reunion with Israeli friends and she told me about her repulsion for gefiltefish. I interview her at her house a few days later for a couple of hours and she spend most of the time explaining me how kosher laws work. She did not want to talk about her or her family.

Gil is mentioned in Chapter 4.

Deborah

Deborah is an active member of the Women's Zionist Organization (WIZO). While doing my fieldwork in 2015 I contacted them to see if it was possible to talk to some of their members especially with those working in areas related to food or cookbooks. They asked me where I was living to match me with members that were nearby. A few days later, they put me in touch with Deborah, who was living a few blocks from me in Ranana. We met at her house for coffee one afternoon in February and after that I visited her a few times per week. Deborah was worried I might feel lonely in Israel so she had me over for dinner often and introduced me to her friends and the friends of the family.

Deborah was born in South Africa and moved to Israel with her husband and two sons more than 20 years ago. She left South Africa due to the violence in the country and what she felt was a wave of anti-Semitism. She and her husband said they felt threatened there, so they decided to start again in Israel. They now live in Ranana, and although her children do not live with them anymore they have kept their family house with the hope of having grandchildren soon. Although their position is comfortable and they live an upper-middle-class life in Israel,

Deborah says things can still be difficult sometimes. Although she always seemed happy and never complained about Israel she had a hard time adapting, and still felt uncomfortable talking in Hebrew. She now works with new immigrants, especially those from South Africa and has a wide network of contacts among them: “It is the same for everyone that arrives as an adult. Learning another language, another culture is not easy, so I have a life outside the house that is different from the one inside. I only speak Hebrew in the supermarket and in the streets, I don’t need to speak it at work and I don’t read it unless I have to”.

Deborah is an avid cook, and we spent a considerable amount of time in a small cookbook library she has next to her kitchen. She was proud of her collection and asked me to bring her a few cookbooks from Ottolenghi from London: “I don’t like him, I can cook his dishes without the need of a recipe and he has made a fortune and has never come back to his country. But I’m curious, my friends in London and in America love him”. Deborah never said she cooked Israeli food, she always talked about “Jewish food” and made efforts to showcase her cooking skills and knowledge about traditional dishes. Deborah did not consider herself religious, but she kept kosher and tried to teach her sons the basic rules in the hope that they would be able to have a kosher house in the future. During the week of Passover, I was a regular guest for dinner and she made a different dessert each night. “I have a lot of Passover cookbooks and I only use them once a year so I better cook as much as I can” she told me while making a strawberry pavlova and homemade ice cream.

Deborah and her family where concerned about security constantly and therefore had decided to vote for Netanyahu as they thought he was the only candidate that seemed able to protect them from their neighbouring country. This was a constant topic of conversation with Deborah who was concerned that all her efforts to keep her family safe might not be worth it if Israel went to war.

Deborah is mentioned in Chapter 5 and Chapter 7.

Ben

Ben is Deborah’s husband. Also from South Africa, he works in a high-tech company. I never interviewed Ben but I saw him at all the dinners and lunches Deborah invited me to and was always willing to chat about politics and food. He never avoided controversial topics, and he often talked about security issues, which were his main concern.

Ben is mentioned in Chapter 7.

Maya

Maya is a food consultant in her thirties. She works with Ofer Vadi and has written several cookbooks. She has also worked with chefs developing recipes, food related TV shows and recipe books. She studied design in the UK but decided to change career paths once she was back in Israel. She is now a successful consultant and is well-known in the food industry in Israel. I meet Maya in 2015 in a coffeeshop and then we saw each other a few times that year and again in the summer of 2016 during the book fair in Tel Aviv in coffeeshops and at the *Lunchbox* stall.

Maya proved to be a good guide to the food world of Israel, but she was especially interested in talking about Israel's food history as well as Jewish food in general. She was always interested in talking about kibbutz food as well as wedding food. We talked for long hours about food trends in the country, from the boom of sushi restaurants to the difficulty of finding a non-kosher venue for hosting a wedding. In 2015, Maya was engaged and soon to be married but by 2016 she had broken off her engagement. Her interest in weddings had decreased, and she preferred to talk about other topics, and avoid this as much as she could, so we concentrated on discussing restaurants, veganism and alcohol consumption in Israel. She was also happy to talk about her experience of working with famous chefs and the politics surrounding her work.

Maya is mentioned in Chapter 4.

Eliana

Eliana is an American woman in her thirties that emigrated to Israel in 2011. I met her in 2015 in a pub in Tel Aviv. The night we met was election night as well as Saint Patrick's Day, and she was celebrating both occasions. She lives in Beer Sheba, but she and her boyfriend wanted to spend the day in an Irish pub in Tel Aviv and to celebrate what they thought at the time was going to be a victory for the Labour Party.

At the time we met, she was studying for her Master's degree in social work at Ben-Gurion University but by 2016, she was writing her dissertation and was working full-time in Beer Sheba municipality with English speaking immigrants. We met once in 2015 and then twice in

2016. I visited her in Beer Sheba and we spent the day walking around the city that she proudly showed to me. Then we met once again in Tel Aviv.

Eliana is originally from a small town in the United States close to Kansas City, where her family still lives. Her mother is Jewish, and her father converted to Judaism later in life. She discovered her Jewish identity when she was a teenager and decided to become orthodox. She said this was part of her "rebellious phase" and talked several times about how difficult she made her parents' life with her determination to follow Jewish law as best as she could. Now in Israel, she considers herself secular, doesn't keep kosher or practice religion, in the same way as her boyfriend.

Eliana is a committed Zionist and believes Israel can be a great country. Nonetheless she complains constantly about the political situation of the country, the discrimination against Arab citizens, the power given to religious authorities, the settlements and the expansionist policies of the right wing. Her boyfriend is Mizrahi and she spends her weekends with his family. This has also influenced her political views, making her more aware of the discrimination suffered by Mizrahi Jews in Israel.

Food is a topic in which Eliana is interested, however she doesn't cook often, as her mother-in-law cooks for them and shops often. Her diet was changed dramatically in Israel, and she believes now she has a healthier diet based largely on the consumption of fresh dairy and salads.

Eliana is mentioned in Chapter 4 and Chapter 6.

Ariel

Ariel is a graphic designer in his thirties. I meet him in 2008 while he was living in Mexico and I was finishing my BA. We see each other frequently and I saw him and his family in Israel constantly during my fieldwork. I also stayed in the flat he shares with his sister in North Tel Aviv for two weeks in 2015 and again for two weeks in 2016.

Due to our long-standing friendship, I was reluctant to include Ariel as one of my informants. We have dissimilar political views, specially about Israel, and therefore I was afraid about what he would say after reading my dissertation. However, he insisted that he wanted to be quoted in my thesis and asked me to call him "Ariel" in honour of Ariel Sharon, one of his

political heroes. I agreed to do it as part of my interest in the topic of food came about after spending two weeks with his family in Israel in 2012.

Ariel and his sister are part of a big family who live in a small town on the road between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. They now live in the family flat while his older sister and her family lives with their parents. His father held a high rank in the Israeli army and nowadays works as a bee keeper and his mother works for the education ministry of Israel. The family has a mixed background and do not identiy either as Ashkenazi or Mizrahi.

During my fieldwork, Ariel took me to numerous restaurants all over the country as well as to friend's reunions in which food always played a big role. Although Ariel is right wing he has friends from all sides of the political spectrum, and therefore the events he invited me to were especially useful for my thesis. His enthusiasm for my dissertation also came from his desire to show me that Israel is a multicultural country and therefore he avoided taking me to high-end restaurants and opted mostly for Arab restaurants, markets, Hummusiyyas[5] and burger places.

Ariel organized "food tours" for me and spent his weekends taking me from market to market and introducing me to stall vendors. He also made sure I went to the "right places" to taste Georgian, Yemenite and Iraqi food and talked at length about why I should avoid high-end restaurants.

As a close friend of my husband, he also felt he had to take care of me, and he checked on me constantly and ask about my other informants, the places in which I was living, and the people I was studying with. During our long food tours, he made sure I understood how Israeli society "worked" so he taught me Israeli slang, what music I should and shouldn't listen to, how to take buses and trains and even Israeli "etiquette".

Ariel is mentioned in Chapter 4, Chapter 6 and Chapter 7.

Tamar and Omer

Tamar and Omer are a couple in their thirties with two daughters. Omer works in a high-tech company while Tamar is training to be a nurse. Tamar and Omer are close friends with Ariel

[5] Small restaurants that normally only sell hummus. Hummus in Israel is eaten as a main dish.

and I met them in 2008 in Mexico. During my fieldwork I visited them several times both in 2015 and 2016. Tamar and Omer always received me with a barbecue. I spent a few Friday nights in 2016 and election day in 2015 with them. On both occasions, they organized barbecues. Tamar cooked salads and side dishes as well as desserts while Omer barbecued the meat.

When I met them, Tamar was finishing her MA in political science, and it is only recently that she decided to change career paths. Tamar is Ashkenazi while Omer is Mizrahi. Tamar is proud of the cooking skills of the women in her husband's family and was always promising to introduce them to me, but it never happened.

Tamar and Omer, although left-wing Zionist live in a settlement in the West Bank. The settlement has a mixed secular and orthodox population, and they decided to move there after a close friend of them and their family moved due to the tax-free policies offered by the government. In 2015, they were still living in Tel Aviv, but the house prices didn't allow them to buy a house, so they decided to move. Omer explained to me in detail why they had decided to move there, and at some moments he seemed ashamed of their decision. After a few visits, he started joking about it "Welcome to the Occupied Territories!" he said on a few occasions. Omer and Tamar were the only ones in their reunions acknowledging the fact that they were living on the West Bank. Ariel made a big effort to hide this from me by avoiding passing checkpoints on our way to the settlement.

Tamar and Omer are mentioned in Chapter 6.

Aisha

Aisha is my only Palestinian Israeli informant. She is in her twenties and was studying accountancy at the University of Haifa when we met in 2016. I met Aisha in the dorms of the University, where I lived for a month in the summer. We met in the courtyard outside the dorms every night and had dinner together with other students from the university. Aisha works at the university branch of *Aroma*, a famous Israeli coffee chain.

Aisha is not particularly religious, but she covers her head with a scarf to reaffirm her Muslim identity. Her Hebrew is perfect, and she is proud of it, so most of our conversations were in Hebrew and she was constantly correcting me and helping me to improve my language skills.

From the day we met, Aisha laughed about my research topic as she considered it impossible to be studying something that doesn't exist, and in her opinion Israeli cuisine does not exist. "They took everything they know from us!" she repeated to me almost every night and changed the topic. She got herself in a lot of discussions with some American Jewish students who did not agree with her, but she was always friendly towards them and helped them with homework.

Aisha is originally from a small village close to Haifa. She goes there every weekend to visit her family and she promised several times to take me, but she never did it. She dreams of traveling in Europe and Latin America and leaving the conflict behind her.

Aisha is mentioned in Chapter 7

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[i] *Loc. cit*